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"WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ME?"

## A STRANGE MARRIAGE; Or, JOHN FOSTER'S HEIRESS.

BY LILLIAN LOVEJOY.

CHAPTER I.

AN OBJECT OF CHARITY.

The cold light of a full moon in December

shone down on a picture of white and dismal silence.

The snow had fallen some feet deep, and the wind had blown it in deep drifts against the brown-stone fronts of the houses which lined the upper avenues of New York.

The streets were deserted, for all had sought shelter from the bitter night. The rich were in their warm, well-lighted homes; the poor where by good fortune, they had found shelter.

Through the thick red curtains of one of the handsomest houses in Madison Square, a rosy light streamed on the white pavement in front, but on the broad marble steps a dark figure lay.

It was impossible to discern anything but a shapeless mass; yet something in the outlines suggested a human form. A very short time of such exposure would have given the tired wanderer a rest from which there is no awaking; but presently a stout, comfortable-looking woman came along, walking as briskly as the storm would permit, and the house from which the rosy light streamed out seemed to be her destination, for she began to ascend the steps, and then perceived the figure huddled there.

With an exclamation of alarm, she bent down, looking earnestly at the miserable little object already falling into the sleep of exhaustion and death.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here, on such a night as this?"

"Leave me alone, can't yer?" came in trembling tones from the partly-roused child.

The woman gave her another prod with the stout umbrella she carried.

"Get up, I say; why, you will be frozen to death if you stay here!"

"Well, never mind; I'm quite comfortable, thank ye."

"Comfortable! why, you will die if you stay here! I wish I could find a policeman; but there never is one when he's wanted. If you don't get up," she continued, shaking the child by her thin arm, "I'll give you in charge."

"W'ot for?" said the child, drowsily lifting her head. "I ain't done anythin' mum. Oh, do leave me alone, and let me go to sleep again, please do!"

"No, no—you must not! My good man," continued the woman, appealing to a man hurrying on, "pray help me to rouse this child; she's been sleeping on the steps, and is half dead."

The man appealed to came up the steps, and lifting the girl by her shoulders, placed her on her feet.

She was roused at last; she felt the grasp, and fearing it was the dreaded policeman, tried to wrench herself free, but her cramped limbs were powerless, and she screamed loudly with terror and pain.

"Come, come!" said the man, shaking her roughly; "don't make that row, you monkey!"

"Let me go—let me go!" she shrieked. "I ain't done nothing, and I'll go—I'll go! I ain't a-stopping of my own accord—it's my legs is numb-like, and won't move; but they'll be all right presently, if you'll give me time."

"Uncle wants to know what the row is about!"

The door of the mansion had been opened, and a young gentleman stood on the steps.

"Oh, Mr. Ernest," said the woman, "it is a miserable little object of a child that's been sleeping here, and won't go away!"

"A child? Why, she will be frozen!"

"Yes, sir, that's what I tell her."

"I can't, I tell yer," mumbled the child, clinging to the iron railing; "I am a-trying to, sir."

The gentleman bent down to look at her. The gaslight streamed on the pitiful object, and from the tangled hair two great pleading eyes looked up. There they stood, the handsome, well-dressed, well-nurtured son of the luxurious home, and the starved waif that was to cast so deep a shadow on his fortunes. Well for them their future was veiled, or how many heart-aches they would have suffered in anticipation!

"Wait a moment, Bennett," he said, gently. "It seems an awful thing to send a fellow-creature away such a night as this; and she looks so starved, too. Are you hungry, you atom?"

"Would you be if you hadn't eaten a scrap since yesterday? I guess you would. But I don't feel very bad now; I did awhile ago."

"Since yesterday! Bring her into the hall, Bennett, and give her something to eat. I could not enjoy my dinner with the memory of that starved face."

"Into the hall, Mr. Ernest!" said the house-keeper, in a tone of horror. "I couldn't think of such a thing!"

"Bring her in, I say!"

"Pray ask my mistress first, sir!"

"Mother, here is a child who has eaten nothing since yesterday," said Ernest, opening the dining-room door. "May not Bennett give her something?"

"Yes, yes," said the lady; "but pray close the door. Such a dreadful draft!"

"A starving child!" said an irritable voice from a large easy-chair close beside the fire. "Bring her in here. The lesson may be useful."

"My dear brother, don't, I pray! My darlings require no such lessons. Bring out your pocket-money, my children, and send it to this beggar."

The lady looked round. She was a handsome woman, richly dressed, and well preserved. The room was magnificently furnished, warm, and well-lighted. Several groups of young people were differently occupied in various amusements. The master of the mansion was in his easy-chair, with his reading-table and newspapers, and opposite to him, almost lost in a spacious invalid-chair, was a little, old, withered, yellow man, whose suffering and sarcastic expression was the only unpleasant element in that luxurious home.

"Bring her in," he reiterated, harshly. "Your children should sometimes see the reverse of the picture."

The lady shrugged her shoulders and looked at her eldest son, and the next minute the struggling child was half-led, half-dragged, into the room.

What an object she was! Not short now she was on her feet; but so thin—so very thin. Her face was pale, dirty and pinched, with small features, except her eyes. Such wonderful eyes—long, dark, wistful and dazed, with heavily-fringed drooping lids half-vailing them.

Her hair, falling about her lean shoulders down to her waist, was tangled and ill-kept, but a mass of wavy brown curls. She was stockingless, wore a ragged dress and pinafore, and struggled to keep the remnants of an old red shawl round her bare neck as she frantically strove to free herself from the grasp of the footman.

"Be quiet," said Ernest, not unkindly. "No one will hurt you."

She stopped struggling and looked up.

"Don't let 'em take me!" she pleaded.

"Who take you?" he said, smiling.

"The perlice!" she said, pointing backward to the magnificent footman.

A burst of laughter greeted her mistake, in which Ernest joined heartily.

"Mr. Figgins," he said, "is not a policeman?"

The assurance, the laughter, the warmth, and the lighted room seemed to restore her scattered senses. She rubbed her eyes with her miserable thin, dirty little fingers, and with a relieved sigh, said, with an apologetic smile, "I thought it was a cop."

"Starved, indeed!" muttered the old gentleman by the fireside.

"What were you doing on the steps?" asked Ernest.

"Going to sleep!"

"Yes; but why did you not go home?"

"'Cause I ain't got no home." Her courage was returning now, and she raised her head and looked round defiantly.

"No home!" said the lady of the mansion.

"Then you should have gone to the police station! Really," turning to her husband, "the police should look after these miserable objects better!"

"The perlice!" said the girl, whose sharp ears had caught the word. "What has the perlice to do with me? I tell you, mum, I never done nothing wrong; and as to going to the station-house, they can take me when they can ketch me!"

"But," said the old gentleman from the corner, "you have not always lived on door-steps?"

"Why, no! Who said I had? I allays lived in Blind Alley with Granny Grants; but

she've been ill a long time, and yesterday some chaps come with a big thing and took her. They wanted to take me, too" (with a rich little laugh); "but I gave 'em all the slip!"

"Yes; and since?"

"Oh, since I've been looking about at the fine things, and soon, an' has nothin' to eat."

"Not likely to get fat on that diet," grumbled the old gentleman.

"Fat!—who wants to be fat?" she said, sharply. "But I don't know why you brought me here, asking so many questions. I can't stand it any longer, and I want to go."

"What an uncivilized creature!" said the eldest of the group of girls.

"What do you mean by uncivil?" returned the child, her lips suddenly tightening with passion as she caught the contemptuous tone. "I ain't been uncivil to you, have I? I never spoke a word to you, did I?—and don't want. All I want is to go, that's all!" And she staggered as if she would fall.

"Stay one moment," said the previous questioner. "What is your name?"

"Con—"

"Con what?"

"Not 'what,' but *Con*."

"Singular name!"

"It's my name, though," she said, frowning and holding to a chair for support. "Old Bill Spriggs—as died last winter—he give me a bit of paper with it writ down, and I've got it here, if you don't believe it;" and from her ragged dress she brought a dirty little calico bag, and carefully drew a torn envelope out of it, and laid it, with a certain pride, upon the table. "Con ain't all the name, I s'pose," she said; "but that's what they calls me."

The children obeyed the gesture of their eccentric uncle, and handed the paper to him.

It was part of an address. The paper was yellow, and the ink faded, but it was still legible; and he read aloud, "Constance Lisle."

"Yes; that's right," she said, extending her thin hand for the paper. "I told Bill I should always keep it, and I will!"

But the extended hand suddenly fell, and the bright eyes dimmed. She clutched at something for support, and would have fallen if Ernest had not saved her.

"What savages we are!" he cried. "She is dying with starvation, while we are keeping her here inquiring into her pedigree."

Pitying hands—for there were pitying hands in that pampered household—carried the girl away and ministered to her wants.

And hours afterward she lay curled up on the comfortable sofa in the housekeeper's room, while servants and family were enjoying their Christmas with lighter hearts for succoring one human waif.

## CHAPTER II.

## AN OLD MAN'S FREAK.

Half asleep, lulled by the unusual warmth and comfort of the room, and conscious only of a delicious feeling of rest, was Con when the door opened, and the old yellow gentleman, whose wishes in that large household were so scrupulously consulted, entered, and drew a chair to her side.

Con kept her eyes closed firmly; she did not want to be disturbed.

He was, as we have said, old and decrepit, but there was almost the fire of youth in his piercing eye.

Cunning indeed must be he who could deceive John Foster in feeling or intention.

He took in and remembered every action and word, though seemingly impassive and unobservant. He was the elder brother of Mrs. Sinclair, the mistress of the mansion. He had dowered his only sister richly enough when she wedded her happy-go-lucky husband and then had gone on accumulating riches; and when at last he ceased work, with broken health and empty heart, he was a millionaire.

To Mrs. Sinclair, being the only relative he possessed, he came; and the rumor of his wealth preceding him, was received with smiling deference and respect.

Mrs. Sinclair's family had increased, but her means had not.

Mr. Sinclair, the head of a large bank, was an easy man, and let the "world slide" in the easiest fashion. Year by year, when his expenditure exceeded his income, he raised on his handsome estates a mortgage to meet it. His family was large and expensive. His eldest son was in the army; his daughters, just budding into womanhood, required to be seen and see. The younger ones were at expensive schools, and so every year the demand became more urgent for ample means.

The advent of John Foster was looked upon as a supreme stroke of good fortune. His coffers were deep and well filled, his health precarious; and Mrs. Sinclair impressed upon her children the importance of conciliating their uncle by every means in their power.

It was perhaps not unnatural that the younger ones should dislike him. He was held as a bugbear to all their sins. To the elder ones his sharp, caustic speeches and sarcastic laughs were even more intolerable. They dared not resent them; but they hated him, and he knew it.

As he sat resting his hands on his gold-headed cane, his eyes took in all the details of poor Con's condition.

She was just the same with her dirty face and thin hands—they had had no time to alter her; and John Foster's eyes certainly wore a more softened look than usual.

"Yes," he murmured; "a wretched, starved, deserted, miserable object! Yet, if I mistake not, a gem all the hard tricks of fortune have not dented. I wonder," he went on, "whether, if I took this creature to my heart, it would be another version of the adder and the countryman. I believe—yes, I believe she might be trained to love me. As to these children of my only sister, I read their aversion under all their disguise, and they think the old fool blind. Ah, ah!" and he chuckled aloud.

It was too much for Con; she could not keep her eyes shut any longer.

"W'otever are you a-lafin' at?" she asked, without moving.

"Have I disturbed you?"

"No; I wasn't asleep—only pretending, 'cause I was so comfortable, and I didn't want any more of your questions."

"I don't mean to ask you any more questions, except where you are going when you leave here?"

"Is it time to go?" said Con, reluctantly uncurling herself. "Oh, and it was so jolly comfortable! Where am I going? Why, anywhere I can find, if they'll let me stop."

"Oh! To some doorstep?"

"If I can find one well away in the dark, where the cops can't see me."

"What could you do if you always stayed here?"

"Do?" said Con, starting up; "I'd—I'd—" and then the thin hands clasped, and she looked up with a world of pathetic inquiry in her quivering face. "Why, what *could* I do?"

"Ah, what indeed?" he said, looking thoughtfully at her. "But suppose—only suppose Mrs. Bennett would try to teach you! Do you think you could try to learn to be a neat, clean handmaiden—one who could wait on a cross, fussy, irritable old man? And would you try to like him?"

"That depends on what he did to me," said Con. "If he beat me—"

"Beat you? Oh, no; he would never do that, Con."

"Well," said she, "I'd try to learn to wait on him properly fust, and then I'd try to like him afterward, if he was a good sort."

This uncompromising speech, far from offending, seemed to please him. If she had promised love and affection before she knew him, he would have been suspicious; as it was, her straightforward reply satisfied him.

"Well, Con," he said, "I shall do the best I can for you."

And he was leaving the room, when he felt the clutch of trembling fingers on his coat.

"Do—do you think there's *any* chance?"

"Yes, yes; I think so—a very good chance."

Con released her hold, and Mr. Foster went away.

How he managed it no one knew; he did manage it, though; and Con was given into Mrs. Bennett's charge, and Mrs. Sinclair's dressmaker received a handsome check the very same day. Whether the two had any connection, who shall say?

Oh, the power of money in this everyday world of ours; how omnipotent it is! It had done certainly much for the starved, homeless waif, so fortunately for herself thrown on the mercy of old John Foster.

A week after her admission to her splendid home, her hair neatly braided, with a new black dress, a clean apron, and boots on her feet, she certainly looked very different; not that she was at all a credit to anybody, nor did she look even comfortable in her new garments. The cramped feet would go on one side in the unaccustomed boots; she sat on the very edge of her chair, crammed her mouth full, and then stopped with her eyes distended, to wonder at some new object, the use of which she could not understand. Her knife and fork were most difficult implements to manage; often they would be dropped, and the fingers brought in active use, till a warning look from Mrs. Bennett brought them to their proper use again.

And what a trial she was to the good woman. If her really kind nature was touched by the dreadful plight of her charge, and her pocket refreshed by sundry gold pieces, her temper was tried fifty times a day. The troublesome fingers of Con were always in mischief; nothing was safe from her inquisitive, and, alas! awkward hands. She did not take at all readily to civilization. Not in the slightest degree cowed by her different surroundings, when the children of the house came to stare at her, never venturing beyond the door of the housekeeper's room, she returned their giggling glances with interest, opening her eyes so widely, and imitating their contemptuous gestures so exactly, that they never attempted a friendly word.

She was almost entirely confined to the housekeeper's room. The cook was indignant, the housemaids declined to sit at table with her, and men called her spiteful names. Altogether, well-clothed, well-fed, and warm, learning to be civilized was not at all a pleasant process to the little street Arab.

One day she disappeared. There was grand consternation, the men were sent everywhere to hunt for her; Mrs. John Foster stormed, and used some unorthodox expressions, and Mrs. Bennett never expected to see her again. And then she remembered that for days past Con had put by, in little parcels, any rich Christmas fare; bits of cake and pudding, pie and fruits, were eagerly accepted, but, Mrs. Bennett found, not eaten.

"She had meant to run away," thought the good woman, "and had been saving for that end;" and she was sorry, really sorry, for she was beginning to tolerate her troublesome charge.

"But Mrs. Bennett was mistaken. Late in the evening Con came back, footsore, pale, hungry, with sorrowful red eyes and quivering lips.

She had been to the poor-house. She wanted old granny to taste some of the good things, and to know how lucky she had been; but her errand was useless—granny was dead—had died two days after her admission, and Con had distributed her little savings among the children, and had returned, sorrowfully and humbly, to her grand home.

When Mr. John Foster heard of it, he sent for Con.

"Well, Con," he said; "so granny was dead?"

"Yes," said Con, her eyes filling; "yes, she was dead."

"And you are sorry?"

"Why shouldn't I be?" she asked. "I liked gran, and gran liked me; and there is no one as likes me now."

"But, Con, you might surely make people like you as well as gran?"

"Who?" she asked, her eyes flashing. "The ladies in the kitchen, or the little gals and boys as comes and stares at me as if I was a wild beast in a show?"

"Aren't they kind to you down-stairs?" asked Mr. Foster, with a frown.

"Kind! why they thinks me p'ison; and that big chap I thought was the perlice, that fust night, have never forgive me. But I don't care, bless you, not one bit; I'm used to it."

"Con," said Mr. Foster, "come here and sit down by me. What did you say, that first night? Didn't you say you would try and learn to be clean and neat, that you might be able to wait upon that old gentleman?"

"I remembers very well all you said," Con said, looking into the wrinkled face of the millionaire, "and I am a-trying to, but it's hard, I can tell yer. That room I thought so grand I almost hates. I want to go out and—"

"Oh, I see!—I see! The old gentleman will have to wait a long time for his handmaiden."

"No, he sha'n't!" said Con, hastily. "I'll begin ag'in to-morrow, and try my very hardest. I wish you was that ole gent!"

"What! Well, suppose I were?"

"Well, then, I do believe I could learn ever so much faster."

"Well, Con, it is me. I want you!"

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly, my little girl!"

The bright light on her thin face flashed all the brighter.

"Oh, I'm so glad it's you!" she exclaimed; and from that time the "civilizing" process did not seem so hard.

The millionaire was a very eccentric gentleman, and took his airings in a close carriage, well protected from draughts. It was his pleasure that Con should go, too. And she went, and enjoyed it as a caged bird its hour of liberty.

Every day, for one or even two hours, if the first passed without any mishap, which at first it rarely did, Con went to Mr. Foster's room, and he talked to her as if she were a rational being. He would not allow her to be sent to school, though she was twelve years old, and scarcely knew her letters. He wisely considered the poor little ill-nurtured body required attention first, and knew the intellect would ripen as the body improved.

And, by-and-by, ignorant, uncultivated, awkward Con would have laid down her life for the irritable, sarcastic old man, who represented to her all that was good and noble. What to her were his bursts of passion? She had been used to much worse, and scarcely noticed them.

Soon after Con's admission in the family Mr. Foster became confined to his own suite of rooms, which he had furnished with Eastern magnificence. His own man-servant was his only attendant, and Con his only visitor. True, Mrs. Sinclair made daily visits every morning for a few minutes, but the rest of the family carefully avoided the apartments.

In vain Mrs. Sinclair entreated—"Helen, do go, dear. Take these grapes to your uncle." Or, "Josephine, it will not detain you a minute; do just call in, and ask how the old man is. Indeed, my loves, we owe very much to your uncle already; but for his acceptable checks we should scarcely be able to go on at all."

"How unnecessarily anxious you are, mamma!" returned Helen. "He cannot live very long, and can but leave his money to us; he has no other relative in the world."

"If I went," supplemented Josephine, "he would only make some sarcastic remark, which I should resent, and so make the matter worse than if I stayed away."

And the discussion always ended by neither going to see their uncle nor troubling any further about him.

And so gradually Con filled the void which, in spite of his crusty humors, was in the old man's heart. Not quickly or easily did Con become gentle and careful. She was so awkward that the footstool often flew across the room with dire intent; but Con always managed to dodge it, and with unconscious forgive-

ness would the next instant come to his side, and, with her large eyes turned to him, would say gently, as she replaced the stool, "Wasn't it a good thing it didn't hit me?"

And the old man would place his withered hand caressingly on her dusky head as she knelt at his feet, and Con knew she was reinstated in his favor, and was unreservedly grateful. She could not get used to the chairs; she had always knelt as she did now, sitting back on her bent legs, in her squalid home.

"Old gran," she said, "had a stool; but there was no other seat." And in his intervals of pain Mr. Foster sat in his easy-chair close to the fire, with Con kneeling opposite, her large, liquid eyes fixed in wondering amazement as he talked.

Love is the finest teacher in the world, and Con soon rose from passive companionship to be the gentlest and most devoted nurse. The hours soon ceased to be numbered that she was with him. All day, and all night, too, if he would have permitted it, she would have been with him shut up in the stifling room without one thought beyond.

Her voice—for Con's voice was peculiar—soothed him. It was not shrill, as would have become her meager form, but rich and musical. Her laugh was the very essence of glee, and would beguile Mr. John Foster into a responsive smile; and he was not given to laugh, except in derision.

She carefully kept out of the way of any other members of the family, and would hide anywhere to avoid them; for as she became more civilized she became aware of the vast difference between those tenderly-nurtured children and herself.

Sometimes, quite early, she did trifling errands for Mrs. Bennett, and once, some months after her admission into the house, she was sent into the drawing-room to remove something Mrs. Bennett's eye had detected, left by one of the housemaids. Con quickly found the article—a black shovel; but her inquisitive eyes longed to examine the splendid apartment, and, forgetting to hasten back, she went round the room wondering and admiring. But when she came to the open piano of ebony and silver, her delight found words.

"Now, then," she said, laying the black shovel on a blue velvet settee, "I'll play a tune." But very much to her surprise, when she had seated herself carefully on the music-stool, and placed her fingers on the keys, she could evoke nothing but jangling discord. "How do they do it?" she muttered. "I can't see no other way than putting your fingers on these white things, but it ain't right. Somehow I should like to hear 'My Mary Ann' played on the pianner."

And to Con's intense surprise and fright, a

pair of masculine hands appeared, one on each side of her, and commenced and played through the wished-for tune.

When it was finished, Con still remained seated and motionless, not daring to look round.

"Now you have had your wish," said a pleasant, gentlemanly voice, "you had better be off to the regions below."

Con twisted round on the stool, and looked up. There, on the hearth-rug, stood a gentleman, cleaning with a bit of India-rubber a spot on his white glove. His riding-whip lay on the table. He was evidently ready to go out, and was so magnificent in his regimentals that Con could not take him all in at one glance. So she began at the top of his light, curly hair, rested an instant at his amused eyes, traveled down his straight nose, stopped full at his small mustache and teeth; went on to his broad shoulders and gold lace, and finished at the toe of his patent-leather riding-boots, with a sigh of wondering admiration.

"Well," said Captain Ernest Sinclair, rubbing away at the obstinate spot, and looking up with smiling eyes at the silent little object on the music-stool—"well, what do you think of me?"

"You're—you're splendid!"

"Thanks!" laughed the young West-Pointer, looking with evident satisfaction into the glass opposite. "Yes; I think the uniform is becoming. But there's my horse at the door, and I hear Bennett calling you! Good-by, Con—for you are Con, are you not?"

Con nodded.

"Yes; I thought so," he said, carefully adjusting the dress cap on his curly head. "No one else has such a pair of eyes!"

And taking up his riding-whip, he went out, leaving Con to find her way slowly to Mrs. Bennett. What she thought, she did not express; but his image, as he stood there in his early, happy manhood, remained stamped on her heart forever.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SHE LOVES ME.

MRS. SINCLAIR was very busy just now. Her eldest daughter, Helen, a handsome girl of twenty, had succeeded in captivating a rich merchant; and Josephine, the second, had "come out;" and it was no easy task, with limited means, to give the world the idea of wealth and prosperity.

Mr. John Foster's checks were constantly in request. Some pressing necessity was always forcing Mrs. Sinclair to her brother's apartment with entreaties for help, and Mr. John Foster gave it without comment.

Two years had gone on by rapid wing. Mr. William Sinclair's estate would bear no more

incumbrances. The bank yielded a handsome income, but every one of the large family was recklessly lavish in their expenditure.

Con had grown taller, but no fatter, and her face was wan and pale as she stood by her benefactor, administering to his slightest wants.

Nothing would induce her to leave him; and the hot rooms seemed to draw her up in height, like a sickly plant in an overheated greenhouse.

Wonderfully gentle and patient she had become, watching with devoted love for any chance of softening the pain she was powerless to avert.

"Why do you do it, Con?" he said to her one day, when days had passed without her seeming to take any rest. "I am so often cross, and seem so ungrateful for your care. Do you think I am rich, and can reward you for it?"

"Rich!" said Con, with her delicious mellow laugh. "Why, I know you are not."

"How do you know?"

"Why, if you were rich, would Mrs. Sinclair complain, and say what a denial it was to have an invalid in the house, and how she wants the rooms you occupy, and yet thinks it her duty to keep you?"

"And you think it's Mrs. Sinclair's charity that allows me to stay in these rooms?"

"What else can it be?" asked Con. "You are not any company to her; and very few will let you stop in their rooms unless you pay your rent regular. Why, if old gran had been a day over, she would have had to turn out. But they won't be hard-hearted to you, sir?" she continued, a sudden fear lighting up in her eyes.

"I think not, Con," said Mr. Foster, quietly. "Why should you think they would?"

"Because," said Con, sinking her voice to a whisper, "I heard one of the young ladies say it would be a good thing when you were gone, and I thought they might want the rooms."

A pained expression rested a moment on the old man's face. It is not pleasant to know your place in the world is grudged by your next of kin. He knew, though Con did not know, that the going referred to was to that home which is so small and narrow, yet is all that the biggest and the least, the richest and the poorest, can occupy.

"There is no doubt, Con," he said, gently, "that I shall soon go to other lodgings."

"You will take me with you, sir? I couldn't, wouldn't stop! Besides," she continued, with a pleading, tearful smile, "I've tried to learn; and you said the old gentleman would always want me!"

"Con, I wouldn't part with you for the world!"

"And I wouldn't go, sir, if you did. You could never get rid of me. I should be like a troublesome dog you had once been kind to; and if you would not let me into your new lodgings, I should sleep on the step—not the first time on a step, you know, sir."

"No, Con; I can't take you there, child; for the lodging I speak of is one in the ground, and—"

But a pitiful cry from Con stopped him.

"Oh, not that, sir! Don't think of that! Oh, what *should* I do without you?"

"You like me, after all, Con, in spite of all my grumblings?"

Con's reply was to kneel down and press her lips to the stool on which his foot rested.

The action was so full of reverent love, that it touched him as no words could have done.

That afternoon Mr. John Foster's carriage was ordered, and though for many weeks he had not been out, he went for a drive, with Con perched in her usual seat at the back.

The carriage stopped at a plain-looking house in a down-town street, with different names written on the door-sides.

Mr. Foster descended and went in, and was there for some time, and when he came out there was a malicious glee in his look that had not been there for some time.

"I am not quite so poor as you think me, Con," he said to her that evening; "and when I am gone there will be enough money to send you to school. You must try to learn, Con, as hard as you've tried to be gentle and kind, because I've asked you, and because you will be happy for it. Do you mark me?"

"Yes," faltered Con.

"And remember you are to try and be happy, and enjoy what I shall give you. You love the cross old man, and will not forget him. My little one, we must all die; and I have not so many ties to earth that I shall regret to lose my hold."

But Con would not be comforted. She knelt at his feet, and sobbed in such an agony of grief that her slight form shook from head to foot.

"Poor child!" said Mr. Foster, looking with softened eyes on the prostrate form. "Yes; she loves me. I have not stooped in vain!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A STARTLING WILL.

ALL the blinds are down in Mr. William Sinclair's mansion in the Square; Mr. Sinclair is not at the bank. There is a subdued bustle. The female servants hurry about in new black French merino dresses, and the men in suits of mourning.

Up-stairs, in the rooms lately occupied by John Foster, is something never seen in his lifetime—something covered with a velvet cov-

ering, whose rich folds sweep the ground, and nearly cover the small form of a girl crouched at its foot.

Beneath that velvet and oak lies all that is earthly of John Foster; and the girl, kneeling in her old attitude, with her hands clasped, her face so pale and wan, was his *protegee* and nurse—Con. She, too, has a black dress—not French merino. She has been with him in life night and day—his only attendant, for he would have no other, and now kept her sad watch by his lifeless form.

She *will* not leave him. Once they removed her, and locked the door. And Ernest Sinclair, coming down-stairs rather early in the morning, had nearly fallen over her as she knelt outside.

"Is that you, Con?" he asked, in surprise.

"Open the door, Mr. Ernest!" pleaded the musical, sorrowful voice. "Let me go in to him, sir; I know he likes me there. And it is such a little time longer!" And Con's voice was lost in bitter sobs.

"Poor child!—what a grateful heart she has!" said Ernest. "Yes; you shall go in, Con. I think we were all rather neglectful of the old chap, except you. Bennett, let the child go in; she can do no harm."

"No harm to him, Mr. Ernest. But since he died, Con has taken neither bite nor sup. Tell her to eat something, sir."

"Con," he said, gently turning to her, and raising her from the rug where she knelt, "go with Bennett, take some breakfast, and then she will let you go in; and I promise you shall not be sent away again."

Con went quietly away; and afterward her silent watch was not disturbed, for John Foster had no attached friends to mourn him, only this waif, picked up from the gutter; but that desolate heart he had bound to his grieved as only the desolate can.

To-day he is to be gathered to his fathers. The plumed hearse and all the ceremony that should attend a man worth a million is to be observed.

When the coffin is removed, the silent, pale, black-robed little figure steps out, and when all is ready, is close behind the hearse.

All wondered who it could be, her grief was so pitiful.

"Figgins," said Ernest Sinclair, before he stepped into the mourning-coach, "see to that child; put her into Mr. Foster's carriage, and don't neglect it."

THE mourners have dined; the carriages have gone, and a small party is gathered in the library to hear the reading of the will of John Foster.

Mrs. Sinclair, in the deepest of crape and grief, is at the head of the table; her husband,

wonderfully nervous and anxious, is at her right hand, Ernest on her left. Her two oldest daughters are together in the bow-window and the lawyer stands opposite to the lady of the house.

He holds a folded parchment, sealed and tied with green silk. He is a grave, pleasant-looking man, and as he looks round, asks, in an inquiring tone, for Miss Lisle.

Mrs. Sinclair's daughters lift their cambrics to their lips to hide their smiles.

"Is it necessary?" questioned Mrs. Sinclair, haughtily.

The lawyer bows "It is."

Mrs. Sinclair rings impatiently, and gives an order to the prompt footman, and presently the shrinking form of Con, in her black dress, and wan and pale, comes in. She had sobbed herself to sleep in her little room up-stairs, had been roughly wakened, and hurried down, with her hair disarranged, her eyes red, swollen, and dim, and with frightened fear in her distressed face.

"Is this Miss Lisle?"

"How ridiculous!" begins Mrs. Sinclair.

But the lawyer is breaking the seal and unfolding the parchment, saying as he does so, "The will of my late esteemed client is short. He had on his retirement from business converted all his property into Government bonds. There are no estates to enumerate. He had but few friends; he leaves no legacies. His man-servant he provided for by deed of gift during his lifetime."

Mrs. Sinclair's face is very satisfied as the lawyer spreads and smooths the document on the table, adjusts his gold eye-glasses, and reads, "The last will and testament of John Foster." It is very short.

"I, John Foster, give and bequeath, absolutely for her sole use and benefit, all and every of my property, of whatever description, of which I may die possessed, to—"

The lawyer pauses and smooths the parchment with his hand, clears his voice, but hesitates.

Mrs. Sinclair bends eagerly forward; Mr. Sinclair nervously clutches the paper-knife he holds in his hand, and Con shrinks nearer the wall as for one moment the lawyer's eye rests upon her.

Then the monotonous voice goes on:

"—to my adopted daughter, Constance Lisle, to be held in trust for her until she reaches the age of twenty-one, unless she marries before that age, in which case the said moneys become at her absolute disposal."

What consternation the will of John Foster has caused! Mrs. Sinclair has fainted, and been carried from the room; her husband, pale as death, sits as if stunned; while Ernest turns gloomily and looks out of the window.

"What," inquires Mr. Sinclair in a falter-

ing voice, "is supposed to be about the amount of Mr. Foster's wealth?"

"Well, sir," says the lawyer, with a glance at Con, who still remains unnoticed, "I should say about one million dollars, more or less."

"One million dollars!" echoed Mrs. Sinclair, who had returned, pale and trembling, to the room. "I shall contest the will! This viper shall never profit by it!"

"What have I done?" said the girl, clasping her hands, alarmed by Mrs. Sinclair's look of hatred.

"Done!" echoed the lady, "Hypocrite! is this your gratitude? Come, Mr. Sinclair!" and she swept out of the room in hot indignation. "I cannot breathe."

Ernest remained, taking a mental view of the situation; not at all bright are his visions.

A timid touch roused him.

"Well?" he said, harshly.

"What have I done, Mr. Ernest?"

"Don't touch me!" he said, impatiently, looking, with anything but a pleasant expression, in Con's wan face. "Why do you pretend to know nothing about it? You do know that you have robbed Mrs. Sinclair—me—all of us!"

"Robbed!" echoed the girl—"robbed you! Oh, how could I?"

Ernest looked into the wondering eyes.

"I suppose she did not know anything about it," he muttered; "it is all that spiteful old man's doing!"

"What old man?"

"Why, John Foster—confound him!"

"Don't say anything against him," cried Con, her eyes suddenly blazing.

"Well, I suppose you are right; you, at least, have nothing to complain of. Fancy you—you," he continued, with a slight contemptuous laugh, "being worth a million of money!"

"Did he leave me any money?"

"Rather!" said Ernest; "and at our cost, too. What a turn of the wheel of fortune! I wish I had never brought you in, but let you die in the cold; it would have been much better for every one."

"Yes," assented Con, sadly; "yes, Mr. Ernest, it would have been much better."

Ernest turned sharply round to her.

"No, it would not!" he contradicted, roughly.

"How should I feel if I had let you die?"

"I could not have robbed you then, and you would be rich. Ah, I know what it is to be poor—it is dreadful!"

"Yes," said Ernest, gloomily, "it is bad enough; but not so bad as being a murderer. There, go along, child. Why should I grudge you your poor little life? But it is all so awkward, it is enough to drive a fellow mad!"

Con drew back as he moved impatiently

away, and would have left the room, but Mr. Terris, the lawyer, stopped her.

"There is a codicil to the will, Miss Lisle," he said, with becoming respect. "I dare say you do not understand that; but I may say it provides you should be sent to school until you are twenty-one, or your trustee arrives, or—with a smile—you are married. Until either of these contingencies arrives, two thousand dollars per annum are to be devoted to your education and personal expenses. If you so decide, you can leave with me now, and tomorrow I will deliver you into the charge of a lady who will do her best to make an accomplished woman of you."

"Yes," said Con, "if I cannot do anything else, I can at least go away. I am going away, Mr. Ernest," she said, returning timidly to his side. "Will you say good-by?"

"You should have gone before," said Ernest, "it is too late now."

"Will you wish me good-by?"

"Yes, yes; and I hope I may never see you again, and then I shall not be reminded of all the mischief I have done by befriending you!"

He walked hastily from the room, and Con, her eyes filled with blinding tears, accompanied Mr. Terris to his house.

## CHAPTER V.

### WEDDED, YET NO WIFE.

MISS CONSTANCE LISLE—for we must forget the street Arab in the rich heiress—was soon established at a well-known boarding-school, where (so the prospectus said) none but the daughters of gentlemen were received, boarded, and educated in all the accomplishments, for the very modest sum of twelve hundred dollars per annum.

Miss Lisle was received with all respect. It was nothing that she could neither read nor spell—did not know a note of music, or could write a line. She was a great heiress; her wardrobe was well stocked, her purse well filled. What did all this matter? And governess, girls, and tutors all endeavored to conciliate her and make her happy; but she was unutterably sad and wretched. She did not feel the confinement of school life; she had been so shut up with Mr. Foster for the last two years, that it was comparative liberty; but the constant thought and care for him, now thrown back on herself, made life a burden for some time; but Constance Lisle was but fourteen, and youth is very elastic.

She devoted herself to her studies, because her benefactor had desired her to do so, and gradually began to take an interest in them. She had no particular brilliant talents; her intellect was very keen, precociously observant and comprehensive, and common sense predominated. She quickly found out what at

first surprised her, that the deference to her wishes, the extra attention and the immunities she enjoyed, were not given her because she was any better than her companions, but because every one said she was richer.

She was at school a year before she made much progress. Her love was of a kind that but once given, was never recalled; and she sorrowed for the love she had lost, and grieved that Ernest Sinclair would never be kind again.

For a time this cramped her energies. She did not care to please any one, and only a sense of duty kept her to her studies; but when time had softened these feelings, she learned rapidly.

No one ever came to see the friendless girl except Mr. Terris, who paid the school bills, and handed her a check for the balance set apart for her personal expenses.

Three years had passed in this monotonous routine, when one morning Miss Lisle was wanted in the drawing-room.

It caused quite a commotion, and Con herself was as much surprised as any one, and, wonderingly and timidly, she entered the room.

A lady rose from her seat as Constance entered, and turned to her.

It was Mrs. Sinclair.

"Are you Constance Lisle?" she said, abruptly.

"Yes," faltered the girl.

Mrs. Sinclair grasped her hand, and drew her to the light, scrutinized every feature, and ran her eyes over the tall unformed figure.

"A perfect savage still!" she muttered, pushing Constance from her, with averted look.

But Constance was used now to respect, and drew herself proudly upright as she turned to leave the room.

"Stay!" said Mrs. Sinclair. "Where are you going?"

"To leave you, madam, as you appear to have satisfied yourself that I am still a savage."

"Upstart as well!" muttered her ladyship. "Oh, he will never consent—he cannot!"

For some minutes she walked rapidly to and fro in great agitation, and Constance noticed how worn and aged her visage had become. Her proud, haughty bearing was gone, and her manner was nervous and snappish, worried, and almost desperate.

"Do you know," she said, at length, stopping in front of Constance, and looking at her with bitter resentment, "what you have done?—that you—you, picked up from the gutter, have ruined irretrievably and utterly those who sheltered and fed you?"

Con looked up inquiringly.

Once before she had been told that she had robbed them all.

"Yes," continued the lady, "my brother's imbecility has ruined us. There is but one way to save us, and that is too humble."

"What can I do?" asked Con, whose eyes had flashed resentfully as Mrs. Sinclair spoke of Mr. Foster.

"Are you willing to do what I may require of you to remedy this mischief—to save my children?"

"Yes," said Con, quietly, "if it is right for me to do it. Tell me how I can save them."

"I cannot now. I have but accomplished half my task. I have still so much to do; but when I send for you it will be to show you how you can repair this injustice. The sacrifice will not be yours alone," she continued, wringing her hands; "would it could be! I have your promise to come to my house?"

"Yes."

"It may be to-morrow, next week, next month; but it must be when there is no other way to avert disgrace and ruin."

And without another look at the pale, agitated girl, she swept from the room.

With trembling impatience Constance waited day after day for the summons to Mrs. Sinclair's. She comprehended she was going to give up her fortune, bequeathed to her by her benefactor; but if it were wrong that she should keep it, she did not regret its loss, and it was to benefit the hero of her untutored heart.

She had not, and could not, forget Ernest Sinclair. He possessed, in her imagination, every grace and good quality; and the hope that in his home she should see him again haunted her.

With wistful eagerness she examined her face and form, but could see no beauty. She saw a pale, thin girl, with glorious dark eyes, a sensitive mouth, and clear, almost transparent complexion; but her figure was unformed; and her arms—she blushed for them, they were so thin.

She reluctantly acknowledged to herself that at present she was not even pleasing; and, remembering Ernest as he stood on the hearth-rug that morning so long ago, she turned away with a sigh for the contrast.

At last the summons so wished for arrived.

A telegram came for her, containing a few words:

"Come by train leaving at 8:30 A. M. A carriage will meet you."

"Haughty and contemptuous!" thought Con. "Shall I go? I need not fear these people. They did nothing for me. I owe them no gratitude; only Ernest, and even he was harsh and unjust. And yet what would I not give for one kind word from him! Perhaps, when I have given up all, he may not think so ill of me. It is worth the trial. Yes; I will go."

And the 8:30 train reckoned among its pas-

sengers a slight, pale girl, clad in a dark chocolate dress, long sealskin jacket, and brown-plumed hat. It was Constance Lisle, traveling for the first time alone, and rushing on to meet her fate.

The carriage awaited her, and with nervous haste and suppressed excitement she hurried up the steps of the mansion.

"My mistress is waiting for you," said Bennett, who came forward to receive her. "Will you come this way?"

Constance passed in. How silent the house was! There seemed a shadow everywhere.

Bennett quietly opened the library door, and she entered. Mr. William Sinclair, pale and agitated, sat at the table; but Mrs. Sinclair had risen.

"Close the door, Bennett," she ordered, in harsh, hurried accents, "and do not let us be interrupted. You are come," she continued, turning to Con, dislike and contempt on every working feature.

"Yes," in a low tone; "I have come."

"Do you understand, you are here to undo as far as you can the evil you have wrought?"

"I have come," said the girl, quietly, "to restore that to which you tell me I have no right."

"There is but one way in which you can do so. Do you consent to it?"

"What am I required to do besides giving up this fortune?" asked Con, some little courage returning at Mrs. Sinclair's contemptuous tones.

"She hesitates, that she may make terms," cried the lady, excitedly.

"Peace, Helen!" commanded her husband. "She has a right to know what we require of her. There is but one way," he continued, turning to the pale girl, still standing; "for Mr. Foster's will provides you cannot touch your wealth until you are twenty-one or—married."

"Married?"

"Yes, child; and if you are willing to rectify this injustice, you can be married at once."

"No, no!" said Constance, recoiling, and putting out her hands; "anything but that."

"Do you think we would ask this if there was any other way?" asked Mr. Sinclair.

"Oh, but this is too terrible!" wept the girl; "to give up a woman's dearest privileges thus—to marry unloved and unloving! Oh, no, no! I cannot!"

Mrs. Sinclair bent forward, and clutched her wrist tightly.

"You refuse," she said, in hoarse tones, "when my husband's good name, my son's position, my daughters' happiness, my children's home are in your hands? How dare you hesitate?"

"Helen," he said, reprovingly, "we have no

right to force her to do this; your vehemence frightens her. The husband we would give you," he continued, turning again to her, "is one of whom any girl might be proud."

"Tell me," clasping her quivering hands, "whom do you wish me to marry?"

"My eldest son," said he, gravely, "Captain Sinclair."

A sudden radiance suffused the girl's expressive features.

"Captain Sinclair?" she faltered.

"Yes," broke in his mother's harsh, strained voice. "To save us from ruin he has consented to make the horrible sacrifice!"

The light faded from the girl's face, leaving her pale and rigid as marble.

"Does he—Captain Sinclair—wish for this marriage?"

"Wish for it?" she echoed. "What, when he could choose from the loveliest and best-born in New York, would he wish to stoop to the streets for his wife?"

All Con's womanhood was in arms; her eyes blazed with outraged pride.

"I will not become a wife under such conditions!" she began.

But Mr. Sinclair put his hand on her arm, and stopped the indignant protest.

"Child, you can never know the service you can render him," he said, in a trembling voice. "He is naturally kind and good. Once his wife, he will be true to you, and you will learn to love him."

"You say my consent to this will help him more than anything I can do?"

"It is so."

"Then I am ready to do what he wishes," declared Con, turning her head away.

"Your rooms are ready for you," said Mrs. Sinclair. "You are aware that the contents of Mr. Foster's suite of rooms are yours; they have been prepared for your use. To-morrow my son will marry you, and six hours afterward start for the far West. He has been ordered there, and leaves you in my charge. I advise you to remain in those rooms always—do you hear?—for you cannot expect to be received as an equal by my daughters."

"She will be my son's wife," Mr. Sinclair gently reminded.

"In name," said his wife, passionately, "only in name! He may never return to the East. I shall never see my boy again!"

Blinded by emotion, Con turned away, and stood for a few seconds in the hall.

The great front door was open, and an impulse prompted her to fly from these cruel people who so coldly disposed of her future life.

It was still early, and Con walked quickly on. She was not afraid—the streets of New York had been her home too lately—and she passed fearlessly along them now. She want-

ed to think, to understand what this was that was required of her.

She was to marry Ernest Sinclair that she might possess him with the wealth left her by Mr. Foster. Then, having done so, she was to be left to the tender mercy of his proud, haughty mother, not for days, months, years, but for all her life; and she would be expected to keep herself apart like a leper from his family.

"Truly Mrs. Sinclair must still believe me the wild animal I once was, if she thinks I will consent to this!" thought Con, suddenly transformed into an outraged woman. "They must have this money—I read a terrible necessity in their countenances; but as they have no consideration for me, I will take my future into my own hands."

It was quite late when a cab deposited her at Mrs. Sinclair's mansion again. There had been great consternation at her absence. But, refusing any explanation, she retired immediately to her own room, and, worn out with fatigue and excitement, soon forgot her troubles in sleep, such as the young and healthy alone know.

Bennett woke her early the next morning, brought her a tempting little breakfast, and laid out on the bed a bridal dress and veil.

"Am I to be permitted to see my future husband, Bennett?" Con asked, as she sipped her tea.

"Madam desired me to answer no questions, miss," answered Bennett, coldly, but respectfully. "When you are ready I will take you to the drawing-room."

Constance turned away to hide the bitter tears that filled her eyes.

"He at least might have been kinder!" she thought, and commenced, with careless haste, her toilet.

The dress was rich in texture, but had been made at random.

"See this, Bennett," she said, at last, after vainly trying to get her dress together; "I cannot wear this thing!"

"No wonder Con's trembling hands could not fasten it—it was too narrow in the chest, hung in folds round the slender waist, was too short on the shoulders, and too wide in the back.

"Dear, dear!" said Bennett; "what shall we do? We must pin it, that's all. The veil is thick; it will not show."

"But I cannot breathe; it is so wretched. Let me wear the brown dress; it fits, and no one will mind."

"Indeed they will, miss! The young ladies have mauve satins. Mrs. Sinclair wishes everything to be proper, if it is quiet. Nothing will alter the fact that it is her son's wedding, if the bride is—"

"Taken from the 'streets'. I understand. Give me this fine veil that hides me so well, Bennet, and leave me till it is time for me to go down."

Bennett threw over the braided chestnut hair the rich thick veil, gave into her hands her handkerchief and gloves, and left her.

Constance Lisle turned to the long pier-glass and looked at herself. Surely never bride of seventeen ever wore a more desolate appearance.

The ill-fitting dress made her seem more awkward and unformed than ever. Her face was quite hidden by the veil, which seemed purposely chosen to conceal her features; but the wretched dress had short sleeves, and her thin arms revealed themselves at every movement.

"It does not matter," thought Con. "They only want the money, and they may have it; but for myself we shall see."

Bennet conducted her to the inner drawing-room, and left her there. She heard voices, but no one came near her; and she drew her bridal veil closer round her, and gave herself up to bitter reflections.

"Well, Con, so you and I are about to take on us the holy bonds of matrimony."

Constance started. Captain Sinclair had entered so quietly he had not disturbed her unpleasant reverie.

"So Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair have arranged," she returned coldly, though every pulse was throbbing at his words.

"Is it as hard for you, this marriage, as for me?" he asked. "I am sorry; but there seems no other loophole to escape ruin and disgrace. You know this, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You know I would not have consented to this but as a last resource?"

"Oh, yes!" struggling for composure. "I know this; you need not explain, Captain Sinclair."

"It's a horrible jumble!" he continued, gnawing his light mustache. "I see no other way of saving them all, but by making sacrifices of ourselves. Certainly it is rather hard for you."

"Pray say no more!" interrupted Con, her calmness gradually disappearing.

"At least," continued Captain Sinclair, "I shall not trouble you with my company. You know I start on duty this evening, to the far western border?"

"Yes, I know. Have you any further observations to make?"

"No, I think not," striding past her to the window. "The carriages are here, so I suppose it is time to go."

Captain Sinclair, his mother, and his two silent, haughty sisters entered one carriage;

Mr. Sinclair and Con the other, and drove off at a smart pace to a quiet church.

Captain Sinclair, as he sat there, looked very gloomy, very dissatisfied and very pale.

He felt they had been hard and cruel to the solitary white-robed girl, saving their home and restoring them to respectability.

Captain Sinclair knew quite well the terrible dilemma into which his father had been drawn.

When no further advances could be drawn from his property, he had raised money on valuable securities given into his care for safe keeping, and now could not raise the funds to redeem them; nothing but ruin and disgrace awaited them unless they were replaced, and this necessity alone had induced Ernest to accept the alternative of a marriage with John Foster's heiress.

He was disgusted with himself, and had resolved to say something kind now, and in the future endeavor to like the wife forced upon him, and be good to her; and he had, moreover, expected a very humble, dejected bride, whom a few gracious words would encourage; but though he could not see her face, the voice was neither dejected nor humble. She was, he thought, conscious of her importance, and was inclined to exact rather than to appeal to his kindness. He was certainly sorry for her, but more sorry for himself. Out of the many pretty girls he knew who would have been pleased to smile on the handsome captain, he could not choose one, but must tie himself to this girl taken from the streets.

These and other pleasant thoughts occupied his mind during his drive, but it ended presently, and he found himself at the altar, holding the slender hand of Con in his, while he vowed to cherish her "till death did them part," and felt the trembling fingers clasp themselves round his hand, with a clinging touch he never forgot.

He slid the ring on the tapering finger, so beautifully shaped a duchess might have envied it, and then almost started to find the ceremony concluded that made Constance Lisle his wife!

He pressed no bridegroom's kiss on the brow of the girl-wife. The hand on which the golden circlet shone was cold as stone as he placed it within his arm, but Captain Sinclair could as easily have faced an enemy's guns as said one reassuring word to her. It was not that he was cruel or heartless, but he was proud, and felt humbled and resentful, and angry with himself.

They are back again at the house in Madison Square. Not one word had passed between Captain Sinclair and his bride, and as the carriage drives up, she springs, unassisted, to the ground, and hurries into the library. Every nerve is tingling in indignant protest against

such contemptuous treatment, and she silently approaches Mr. Terris, and stands by his side, as still and rigid as a statue.

Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair, and the captain have entered before Mr. Terris speaks; then, with one glance at the girl by his side, he begins.

"At my client's request, miss—that is, Mrs. Sinclair," with a bow to the veiled figure—"at her request, I have prepared a deed which requires only her signature to make over to her husband the sum of \$500,000, being the half of the fortune left her by Mr. John Forster."

"The half?" cried Mrs. Sinclair. "It is a mistake!"

"Pardon me, madam; it is no mistake—\$500,000—it is quite correct! By my advice she retains the disposition of the other half till the arrival of her trustee. Now, if you please, Mrs. Sinclair, if you will sign this just here where you see the red mark, we shall have finished this part of the business. Thank you. Now place your finger on this seal, and say after me, 'I declare this as my act and deed!'"

Con had thrown back the bridal veil; her eyes were blazing with passionate scorn and defiance. And as she repeated the magic words, she looked for the first time into her husband's face. His eyes were gloomily downcast, and though he heard every syllable, he would not look up.

"Captain Sinclair," she said, her clear, musical voice sounding like a bell, "there is the deed! Your ring, your manly tenderness, your name, are doubtless cheap at \$500,000, but you shall have the best of the bargain! Your ring I return to you; your kind consideration for my future I decline; your name I refuse to use; at least, the street Arab will be as generous as her patrons. Good-by, Captain Sinclair; I relieve you from an uncomfortable burden, for, believe me, it shall be no fault of mine if we ever meet again!"

Ernest raised his eyes, and for one instant they rested on the transformed girl he had made his wife. He started forward, but she glided from the room, followed by Mr. Terris, who, hastily wrapping her shivering form in a mantle, hurried her to his waiting carriage.

He was about to follow, when a strong hand pushed him aside, and Ernest Sinclair, bare-headed and very pale, stood at the carriage-door. Constance drew further back.

"Take back your ring," he said, in a voice of emotion. "Remember, nothing can undo what we have done to-day."

"I know—I know," she said, in quivering accents; "but I will never wear it—never! Take it away, and let me go."

"You decline to remain with my mother?"

"Yes. Never, willingly, shall my foot cross her threshold again."

"Then you determine that you and I, bound by this indissoluble tie, shall go through life separately?"

"Yes; it is better."

"Will you forgive me for my part in this wretched affair, and believe it was only dire necessity that compelled me to sacrifice you?"

Constance leant forward; the light was dim, the mantle hid the ill-fitting dress, and softened the sharp lines of her features, and her glorious eyes, swimming with tears, were raised to him as she held out her hand to him without a word.

Captain Sinclair bent his head, touched it with his lips, and drew back, with a sudden revelation breaking upon him.

Then the lawyer got in, the door was closed with a bang, and the carriage drove off.

"What a brute I have been!" said Captain Sinclair to himself, as he re-entered the house. "That was no child's face, but a woman's, with a woman's heart, crushed and despairing. Poor Con! Poor deserted little wife! Yet happier than your husband, who despises himself!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"To be sold, the fine old mansion and furniture, extensive grounds, cottages, etc., etc., comprising the estate of Holmdene," etc., etc.

This was the advertisement that had appeared one morning in the *Herald* about three years ago, and, fortunately for those who wished to dispose of it, attracted the notice of General Harcourt.

He went with his daughter, saw and approved of the estate and purchased it. There the general had remained for some weeks, planning and beautifying, pulling down and erecting, attended by an efficient corps of builders, architects, decorators and gardeners.

He was always accompanied by his daughter, a pale, slight, sad-eyed young thing, who rode on her pony close by his side, and to whose wishes and tastes he constantly deferred.

Miss Harcourt, though gentle and kind to all, took very little interest in the adornments of the splendid home.

So when all was arranged, and could be carried out without him, General Harcourt went abroad, taking his daughter with him.

Three years had gone since Constance Lisie had become the wife of Captain Sinclair, and General Harcourt had returned not to Holmdene. He had determined to stay a few months in London to introduce his daughter into society. They had been to Paris, to Switzerland, to Germany, and Italy, and had stayed in each long enough to see its beauties and peculiarities, and they now lingered for a while in New York.

It was the hight of the season; spring had covered the earth with her charming robes of tender green; but society kept the ball-rooms crowded.

"I wish to-night was over," said Miss Harcourt, as she sat at the head of the general's well-appointed breakfast-table. "I am so tired of these crowds."

The general looked up.

"Tired, Constance?" he said. "Why, my love, what heresy! The acknowledged belle of the season tired of admiration! I cannot understand it."

"Ah, dear general, I do not care for that kind of admiration."

"Yes, I know you are very hard to please—at least your admirers say so; but, dear, if you are really feeling weary, I will not press you to accept any more invitations, only to-night I expect to meet my old friends at Major Carrington's. A military ball I always thought possessed peculiar attractions for you?"

"Yes, dear, it always has, and I mean to shine to-night; but somehow I feel nervous over this ball."

"Nervous?" laughed the general, as he folded his paper. "Wait till you are in the ball-room; it will be a new attraction in the self-possessed Miss Harcourt to see her frightened and awkward like a shy school-girl."

"Say no more," said Constance, kissing his wrinkled cheek. "I promise I will not disgrace you."

The general fondly returned her caress, as he left the room.

Constance Harcourt sat down on the low settee in the bow window. An indefinable presentiment of something about to happen filled her being, and busy thoughts crowded on her memory.

Beautiful as a picture of youth and loveliness she looked as she sat there, resting her dimpled chin on the palm of her hand. Her glorious eyes, fixed on vacancy as she recalls the past, change at each feeling the retrospection evokes.

Her well-developed figure was graceful as Diana's herself, and as full of charming curves and graces; her cheeks and lips were as soft as thistledown, and exquisitely tinted. Well may she be the belle of the season, if in the close-fitting dark cashmere dress she looks so lovely.

She wears now a pretty, pensive air, that makes her more attractive than ever, as she looks back into the past.

She sees herself a starved foundling, falling into the sleep of exhaustion and death; hears again the clear tones of the son of the house; sees herself a forlorn little figure, following a plumed hearse; stands again at the altar, with her hero and daydream for husband; catches herself listening for the kind words that never

came; and her eyes flash and kindle as she rejects again his protection and name.

And then her thoughts go on to a day when, unutterably sad and lonely, the general came to her and told her, for his friend John Foster's sake, he would be her father and friend; and the liquid eyes grow tender as she remembers how by his loving care he had chased away the heavy sorrow that seemed to have settled on her young life; how he had wandered for her sake over foreign lands when he was longing for rest in his own country. And rest he should have now. Holmdene, purchased by her own money, should be home for both; nothing should ever come between them; to him she would devote herself. As to the husband who had so coldly deserted her, she could live happily enough without him. No love for man should ever enter her heart.

"Dreaming, my child?"

Constance started, and came back from the past, to find the general standing by her side.

"I was thinking," said Constance.

"Well, dear, think no longer, but hasten to put on your habit. Your horse will be round directly, and I want you to ride with me."

"Yes, dear," assented Constance, springing up. "A gallop is the very thing I should like."

"Run away, then," commanded the general.

The park was crowded. Beautiful women, handsome men, pretty children, grand equipages were coming, when General Harcourt, his fine military bearing, gray mustache, and dignified air making him a suitable escort, rode by the side of the fair girl, on whom all eyes were cast.

"Ah," said the general, presently, as a handsome open carriage approached; "that is William Sinclair's carriage. They seem to have got over their disappointment. It was rather strange, my friend cutting them off so completely; Mrs. Sinclair was his only sister. Of course you do not know them, nor need they you, my darling; they might not be so cordial. I must speak to them," he continued; "they were very old friends, and I have not seen them since I returned. They have a son, a fine young fellow, of the army. Mrs. Sinclair, your most obedient."

And the general bowed with courtly respect as the carriage stopped.

"Why, general," said the lady, extending her gloved hand, "where have you been wandering?"

"I have been abroad," the general answered, "giving my daughter the benefit of a little foreign travel. Allow me to introduce my daughter to you, my dear Mrs. Sinclair."

The lady bowed graciously, and Constance as coldly and proudly as her own daughters would have done.

"And your son?" asked the general. "Is he still in the West?"

"No," said the lady, a shadow coming to her still smooth brow. "He has been recalled."

"At your service, general!"

Constance started. Close beside her, bronzed, upright, sitting his horse as only a soldier does, was Captain Sinclair.

The rose tints faded from her cheeks, a frightened look came into her eyes, and involuntarily she tightened her rein. Her spirited mare sprung forward, and Con, scarcely knowing what she did, struck her sharply with her whip.

Cora was quite unused to such treatment, and resented it by plunging forward and then rearing upright.

Captain Sinclair wheeled his horse in front of her, rose in the stirrups, and brought her down with a jerk.

"What was it?" asked the general, hastily. "I never knew her do such a thing before. Something must have hurt her. Captain, I did not know you were in New York. This is my daughter."

Ernest bowed; but Constance was patting her horse's neck, and did not look up.

"I will ride on, I think," she said, quietly.

"You had better not, my child. Why, you are quite pale! The stupid animal has frightened you!"

"I shall be happy to escort Miss Harcourt, if you can trust me," said Ernest, who could not see the face of General Harcourt's daughter, it was so persistently bent forward.

"Yes, my love; ride forward with Captain Sinclair, for I wish to speak to Major Carrington, and Cora seems restless."

Constance had regained her composure, as she turned to Ernest, and, with a slight smile, rode on.

Captain Sinclair was very handsome, very gallant, and a soldier—three attractions he found very serviceable in his flirtations, and he did not feel particularly flattered by the look averted of the beautiful girl by his side.

"Does your mare often play you such tricks?" he inquired, trying his utmost to look into her visage.

"I have never known her do so before."

The rich, musical tones seemed familiar, and he wished more than ever she would turn to him.

"Do you go to Major Carrington's this evening?"

"We are invited."

"Will you buy a bunch, sir?"

A flower-girl, with bunches of white and purple violets, was almost under his horse's feet.

"No, no, child! Do go back—you will get hurt!"

And Captain Ernest pulled up his horse sharply.

For the first time, Miss Harcourt turned quite round to him.

A wretched little child, with tangled hair and big black eyes, held up in her thin fingers the bunches of violets.

"Do buy some, lady," pleaded the child.

"Would you like some?" asked Ernest, eagerly.

But Miss Harcourt's eyes were fixed on the child as if she saw a vision.

"Come here," she said.

And in a moment the girl was by her side.

She stooped from her saddle, and took one bunch of white violets from the little hand, and then, with a distressed air, remembered she had no purse. How could she disappoint the eager child? She turned to Captain Sinclair, every feature beaming with gentle pity, and the large dark eyes soft and liquid as wells of light.

"Will you lend me your purse?" she asked. "I have no money."

With a puzzled, dazed air, Ernest drew out his wallet and handed it to her. He was trying to think where he had seen eyes like hers before, but in vain; he could remember no one like her.

Constance drew out a dollar bill, pressed it into the astonished little hand, and rode quickly on.

"I am your debtor, Captain Sinclair," she said, as she returned his purse. "I am very much obliged to you."

Ernest could find nothing to say to the formal little speech. He had never been at a loss before for a compliment to a pretty girl, and felt quite angry with himself. The general joined them, and he could not redeem his omission. And when he parted from them he felt he had made anything but a favorable impression.

"At last," thought Constance, "we have met again—the husband who threw me as carelessly aside as a discarded glove. The recollection of his forsaken wife has not troubled him. He is more manly, handsomer and stalwart, and seems perfectly satisfied with himself and the world. He does not dream who rode beside him. He was polite and attentive to Miss Harcourt, as I have no doubt he is to every girl with any pretensions to good looks."

And Constance ended with an impatient sigh, and a feeling very like jealousy in her heart.

"Why, you are perfectly radiant!" was the general's comment, when Constance came into the drawing-room, ready for the ball that night.

"And I intended to be!" she laughed, with her own delicious, gleeful tones. "You thought you were to monopolize all the gentlemen's attention, so I have put the sheen of satin

against the glitter of gold! Kiss me, dear general, and tell me you are satisfied with me!"

"How could I be otherwise? The dress is lovely and you—"

"Tell me, really and truly," she said, putting both rounded arms up to his neck; "do you think me pretty?"

"You will be told so fifty times before the evening is over. Why do you require an old man's compliments?"

"Because you will tell me the truth, but they will say so only because I am Miss Harcourt."

"You are mistaken, child. Look into that glass and tell me, if you were Miss Anybody-else, you would think her pretty."

Constance tried to look critically at herself.

She wore an amber satin dress and train, trimmed with filmy black lace. Her hair dressed full on her forehead, seemed a perfect nest for loves and graces to nestle in, it was such a shining, shimmering mass of feathery curls and gleaming threads. They lay on the broad white brow, clustered over the well-shaped head, and lost themselves in a glossy braid at the back; natural roses looped the lace of her train, and white violets were in her hair and on her bosom.

Little fear that in this superb lady Ernest Sinclair would recognize the miserable little mortal he had dragged from the school-room, married and forsaken.

"Doubtless," thought Con, "he has never given a thought or felt a care for her."

But Con was mistaken.

The scene in the library, the last look he had caught of Con's face, had touched his heart. With something akin to admiration, he appreciated her spirited rejection of his name, though he felt sure from that last glance of hers that, child as she was, she loved him.

Often in the night he thought how pitifully he had acted, and would turn over with a groan as he remembered that he could never undo the part he had played. He had treated her as no woman ever could forget, and then gradually a great wish to find her and endeavor, by kindness, to obliterate the past, came over him. With some difficulty he got leave and returned to New York, and went to Mr. Terris for information. But the lawyer knew nothing of Mrs. Sinclair. He had recommended a school, and she had gone there for a few months after her marriage.

Then she had withdrawn the whole of her fortune, handsomely remunerated him, and gone where she had left no trace, and wished to leave none. Mr. Terris suppressed the incident of General Harcourt's return, and that Constance had pledged him to secrecy concerning her marriage.

Three years had elapsed since then, and Mr. Terris had not seen her since they parted.

So Captain Sinclair gave up the search and returned to his rooms.

He decided that they were lonely as he dressed for the ball at Major Carrington's. He had never felt so dull before. He wished he had never come back, and would return to the West as soon as he could. He was tired of flirting. If he could have found the girl he had married he should have been content to stay; and, if she were in the least degree kind, make amends to her for his desertion; but that hope had vanished.

How many pretty girls there were, he thought, as he made a careful toilet for the ball, and what a lovely girl General Harcourt's daughter was! He had never heard that his old friend had a daughter, much less such a one! How sweet and pitiful and soft her eyes looked at that miserable little flower-girl! If only they would look at him with such an expression! And here he pulled himself up with an impatient sigh.

He hoped she never would, and that he should never heed it; it was all a jumble, and his life was spoiled, and he was not such a bad-looking fellow.

And Captain Ernest surveyed himself in the pier-glass with the same satisfied expression he had worn seven years before.

He certainly looked very handsome and soldierly as he entered the ball-room with Mrs. Sinclair, and that lady glowed with gratified vanity as she leaned on his arm.

Many were the congratulations on his return, and many the bright eyes that smiled upon him; but with strange persistency he kept searching for General Harcourt and his fair daughter.

It was a brilliant scene. The bright uniforms, the elegant dresses, the choice flowers and gleaming statues, were most effective. And truly through these many lovely faces, elegant forms, and beautiful dresses, Constance Harcourt shone pre-eminent. She was so graceful and courteous, so unaffected and retiring, that she attracted a little court of admirers wherever she moved.

Conscious of an attraction which he felt he ought to resist, Ernest kept away from her vicinity, though, however occupied, he found himself watching her every graceful movement.

"What do you think of my friend?" his partner asked him—a pretty, smiling blonde.

"Your friend?" asked Ernest; "who is he?"

"He! As if I counted *he's* in my list of friends! My friend is a *she*, sir."

"Pardon me; the mistake was a natural one."

"That you would not say if you knew her."

"Let me know her, then. I presume she is some amiable young lady with red hair, freckled complexion, and 'tip-tilted' nose, who serves as a foil to your superior charms! I believe those are the friendships young ladies make."

"Ernest Sinclair, I am angry, and the best reply I can make is to introduce you to this red haired beauty. Come on, sir; I see we can reach her now. Miss Harcourt, I beg to present you an admirer in Captain Sinclair. He declares you must have red hair, snub-nose, and other peculiarities, or you would not be my friend!"

Constance raised her head to meet an admiring glance from Ernest's deprecating blue eyes.

"You are most cruel, Miss Forrester. Pray do not heed her, Miss Harcourt, or punish me! Will you let me put my name for the next waltz?"

"If I am not engaged," said Constance, handing her programme.

She would not look up again; she was afraid her varying emotions would be betrayed.

"You will not enjoy your waltz," demurred Constance, "for I waltz so badly that I have always declined."

"I cannot imagine you dancing badly."

And the next moment they had joined the dancers.

It was like a dream to Constance to feel the strong supporting arm of her husband round her. The rose-tints deepened in her cheeks, her lips parted, her magnificent eyes danced and glowed, sparkled and gleamed beneath the drooping lids.

No wonder that Captain Sinclair, looking down on the graceful head so near his heart, felt it throb with a sweet feeling that he had never felt before.

"Come into this recess; it is cooler."

They were both breathless; he from excess of feeling, of sudden, involuntary admiration, and something very near akin to love, and Constance from a dozen different emotions. Love, delight, hope, and happiness chased each other over her face as she sunk into a seat. She dared not look at her partner, and kept her head averted, much to his annoyance.

"Did I understand you had never waltzed before?" he asked, bending forward in the vain hope of looking into her face.

"Yes," said Constance, in a low tone; "I have never waltzed before."

"Then I am to consider myself honored?"

"If honor it be to waltz with me."

"You cannot doubt it. May I have the next waltz?"

"Not to-night, Captain Sinclair. I am tired, and shall not dance again."

"You intend to disappoint all these gentlemen?"

"They will survive it," with a smile.

"Their loss I shall make my gain, for, with your permission, I shall keep my seat by you, and try to entertain you."

"You are too polite. I would not for the world deprive you of your dances!"

"What can you see, Miss Harcourt, on the other side of the room?" demanded Ernest, almost impatiently. He had tried to look into her face, and had thrown the most pleading expression into his eyes; but Miss Harcourt kept her head turned away, and the handsome captain was almost offended.

"I was looking for the general."

"Why?" and Ernest seemed annoyed.

"I was wondering if he were tired, and would go soon."

"Very complimentary to me."

"I did not mean to be rude," said Constance, turning a little to him; "but I am always tired of crowds. I do not like New York. I shall be glad to get back to Holmdene, again."

"When do you go?" asked Ernest, who felt as if something very precious was slipping from his grasp.

"Next week, at furthest."

"Then I shall go back to my regiment the week after."

Constance did look up now, at the petulant tone.

"How long have you been in the East?" she asked, gently.

"Four days, and all this day I have been wishing myself back again."

"Why?"

"Because I am lonely, and disappointed, and—"

"Lonely! Of all men, I should think Captain Sinclair least likely to feel lonely."

The soft, sympathetic eyes looked into his now, and Ernest started and his cheek flushed. The expression was familiar. Where *had* he seen such orbs before?

"Lonely is not exactly the word," explained Ernest, floundering for expression with that magnetic gaze fixed on him; "but three years in the wilderness, you know, make a fellow long for home."

"Well, you came *home*."

"Yes, I came home; but not to a home."

"I saw Mrs. Sinclair in the carriage this morning, did I not?"

"Yes, yes; my mother was pleased to see me."

"And you had lost no one from your home circle?"

How this girl's clear, musical voice seemed to probe his heart! He felt as if she knew of his unsuccessful search, his marriage, and all.

"Lost!" he echoed, the color receding from his cheeks. "How lost?"

"No one had died," he said, gloomily; and then glanced up suddenly. Those brilliant eyes

certainly looked reproachfully. He pushed back his chair, and ran his fingers through his hair in a bewildered fashion.

"You surely, then, can make yourself happy in New York for a few months?"

"I will try to," he said, "if you will help me."

"How?"

"First, do not go to Holmdene yet—there are all kinds of gayeties these next few weeks; and, secondly, permit me sometimes to be your escort."

Constance smiled.

"We are sure to meet if I stay," she remarked.

"Will you come to my mother's garden party? It is some day next week. Do say yes."

How eagerly he waited for her reply.

"You must ask the general," she said, demurely. "He is my keeper."

"Then I am sure of success. What, supper already! How short the evening has seemed!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### HAVE WE MET BEFORE?

"WELL, darling, what did you think of the ball last evening? I thought it delightful, and the best of the season."

"I was rather tired," answered Constance, languidly.

"What! and the best waltzer and handsomest man in the room losing his dances to sit them out with your capricious ladyship?"

"To whom do you refer, Rose?" asked Constance, with a slight flush.

"Don't try to look unconscious, my love. Of course I mean the returned hero, Captain Sinclair."

"Is he a hero?" asked Constance, innocently.

"Of course he is; and I shall quarrel with you if you do not admire him."

"Pray don't, dear."

"Well, admit he is handsome."

"Ye-es."

"And brave."

"If he is a hero, he must be brave. Who ever heard of a cowardly hero!"

"And good."

Silence.

"No answer? This is too bad. I suppose you have heard that he flirts?"

"Does he flirt? I had not heard of it; but he looks capable of it."

"And whose fault is it if he does flirt? I am sure the girls meet him half-way. Besides, most soldiers do flirt outrageously."

"I dare say; but, Rose, dear, let us talk of something else. Will you come to Holmdene with us?"

"Will I come? Yes, darling, with all the pleasure in the world. Mamma goes to Newport in the first week in July. Shall it be then?"

"My dear Constance, I bring you an invitation to Mrs. Sinclair's garden *fete*. I have been calling on her, and volunteered to bring it," said the general, entering, and handing to Constance the tinted note. "They have a charming country seat now," he continued; "the drive alone will do you good. And, by the by, I met Captain Sinclair, and invited him to dinner; and he seemed quite pleased at the invitation."

"What am I to think?" murmured Constance, as she stood ready to descend to the dining-room. "Is he really interested, or is he only flirting with a new face? Would it be possible to win his love? Dare I try? If I let this love fill my life, as it will do if I see him, and he forsakes me again, what should I become? What should I do with my life? Oh, even now my heart is moved; I cannot recover the calmness I had learnt to feel. I love him so—I love him so!" And the forsaken wife of handsome, careless Captain Sinclair struggled bitterly to regain the composure that had deserted her.

But in his presence she forgot her fears; involuntarily she exerted every charming grace, sung as she had never sung before, was soft and sparkling by turns; her melodious laugh rung through the handsome rooms and infected them all with the very spirit of glee. Never had the general seen his darling so bright and happy, and he rejoiced.

As for Captain Sinclair, his feelings he could not account for. He admired her beauty more than he had ever admired before. Her brilliant conversation, modest shyness and soft gentleness entranced him. He could not help himself. His eyes followed her every movement; he listened to every tone; and withal there was a fanciful idea that he had known her before.

"Miss Harcourt," he said, "have you ever in your life met any person or acted any scene which appeared familiar to you—as if, in fact, you had done the same thing or seen the same person in a previous state of existence?"

"Why?" asked Constance, bending over an album they were both looking at.

"Because, sometimes a look or tone of yours seems familiar; and the other evening I could have sworn that I had held your hand in mine before."

"It must be some other young lady of whom I remind you."

"No; it could not have been. I have never met any one like you."

"You have met so many, you may have forgotten."

"I should not forget *you*, or the first time we met!"

Constance looked up from the album, with something like alarm.

"Ah! I see our meeting has made no impression on you; doubtless you remember the features of the flower-girl better than mine, for you certainly did not condescend to favor me with a glance."

An involuntary smile crept round Con's pretty mouth.

"The first time they met!" How horribly like she *then* had been to that flower-girl!

"This is Holmdene," she said, turning to a photograph of a fine old mansion.

"You are not going there this week?" he asked, quickly.

"No; I have accepted Mrs. Sinclair's invitation. The general—"

"Yes, yes—I understand," impatiently; "it was he, not you, who wished me to come."

"I was going to say that the general and I should enjoy a trip up the Hudson very much."

"Miss Harcourt, I shall wish you good-night; I scarcely know myself to-night. I feel thoroughly disagreeable, irritable and impatient, and shall offend you presently; I had better go."

"And it is time," added Constance, laughing; "it is one o'clock, and the general pretends to be reading, but I know he is asleep."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE STORY OF HER BIRTH.

MRS. SINCLAIR'S summer villa on the banks of the Hudson was as beautiful as nature and art could make it. Surrounded by extensive grounds which sloped to the water's edge, handsomely furnished and luxurious, she had been pleased to throw it open to her admiring friends. Her daughters were married; and, warned by past experience, Mrs. Sinclair took care to live within her handsome income, and she was certainly much happier for it.

"I think everything is ready," she said to Ernest, as she stood in the handsome reception-rooms. "It will be a brilliant gathering; nearly every one has accepted my invitation. I am glad General Harcourt and his daughter are coming. People say she is very rich, and she is certainly very beautiful."

"Yes," said Ernest; "she is pretty."

"How indifferent you wish to appear! Do you think your mother blind, that she cannot see your admiration and your constant attendance on her?"

"Have I been too attentive?" asked Ernest, turning quickly.

"No more so than agreeable," returned Madam Sinclair, laughing. "I noticed last evening at the opera that her lovely eyes were

positively like stars when you entered her box."

"Cease, mother," commanded Ernest, hoarsely. "You will drive me mad. Heaven forbid I should win her regard! How can you, knowing, as you do, that somewhere is a poor little deserted wife, who, Heaven help her, may be as wretched as I am?"

"Oh, Ernest, my boy, is it so with you yet?"

"Yes, mother; it is so. I could love Miss Harcourt devotedly; but you know I dare not; and as an honorable man *will* not," and Captain Sinclair strode from the room to avoid receiving the first guests.

But he *did* forget his forsaken wife when he was standing at the water's edge with Constance Harcourt in the soft evening twilight. The water was like silver, and there was a witchery about the hour and the girl which drove all other thoughts from his head. How lovely she looked standing there! The knowledge of the stake she was playing for her husband's love lent a soft, earnest shyness to her manner. Sometimes her liquid eyes looked so pleadingly into his handsome face, that he felt almost constrained to ask her what boon she craved that he could grant.

Little did he think it was his love and care she sought—the love he felt that had gone out to her in all its fullness and entirety; for Ernest Sinclair had kept his heart free, hitherto. He had felt that he had no right to win a love which he could not in honor return.

But this girl was so different. He manfully tried to be true to the one he had wedded, and kept a stern control over the expression of his feelings; but she possessed some magnetic influence which he was powerless to resist. Perhaps it was the intense longing and love in her own heart that drew him to her.

"Would you like a row?" he asked, eagerly. "There is a boat, and I am a good rower. You will be quite safe."

"Yes—oh, yes; I should like it very much."

Her tone was so soft, and low, and intense, it thrilled the heart of her companion. It was such joy to her to have him with her that she could not restrain its expression in her voice.

He lifted her carefully into the rocking little pleasure-boat, drew her wrap around her, and took the oars.

Never in the after years did either forget that row, or cease to remember the delicious feelings that pervaded their whole being.

Constance was almost silent.

Her thoughts and hopes were rushing madly through her heart, and reflecting themselves in her glorious eyes. She could scarcely mistake his eager attentions; he must be beginning to love her. She did not notice his silence, these thoughts so filled her being; and when she

looked up, with tender, shy eyes into his face, she started, he was so pale and sad.

She had taken off her glove and let the rippling waves run over her hand as they glided by, and Ernest was looking at her hand.

The beautifully-shaped fingers and dimpled wrist seemed to possess some weird attraction for him.

"What is it?" she asked, quickly, shaking the drops from her fingers.

"I—I was looking at your hand!" he faltered, lifting his eyes, with a sigh.

"Yes; you looked as if you saw some phantom from the deep."

"It was not a phantom from the deep, but from the past," Ernest answered, solemnly.

Why, even in this the happiest moment of his life, should the remembrance of the girl he had married obtrude?

"Ah!" persisted Constance, "my hand recalled some other hand you remember?"

"Yes," he said, gloomily.

"To whom did it belong? To some lovely unknown in the far West, or to one known and admired here?"

"To neither," in pained accents. "Let us not speak of it. See how exquisitely the sun is setting! Let us be happy this one evening; it will soon be over."

"Yes, for there is the general on the bank, and he is waving to us. We must land."

"I thought you were drowned!" cried the general's cheery voice, as they came ashore, "or that some mermaid had drawn you under!"

"We have not been long, dear?" half-queried Constance, as she passed her hand through his arm.

"Not long? One hour and a half by my watch since I saw you come down the slope; but if you like boating so much, you can have plenty of it at Holmdene. There is a splendid stream through the estate, you know. We will send a boat on, my dear."

"I am rather afraid of the water, and cannot row; so I think it would be useless," she demurred.

Afraid of the water, and yet had eagerly ventured with Captain Sinclair!

"Then we had better engage a boatman. Captain, you are an idle man. Suppose you accept the situation, and come to Holmdene?"

Captain Sinclair looked at the girl, walking so demurely by the general's side.

She had turned to him; the soft, pleading look was in her eyes, a charming flush suffused her cheek.

For one minute he hesitated, and in that time he lost all his resolutions, made five minutes before, that he would never again throw himself into temptation.

The hand so like that other on which he had placed the golden badge of loyalty had recalled

him to a sense of the abyss into which he was drawing her.

She was so cold and distant to all others, yet so sweet and affable to him. He feared and hoped, dreaded and would have prayed for, if he had dared, the feeling that prompted her smile.

And this unexpected and gracious invitation opened to him such a source of bliss that he could not refuse it.

"Your invitation is most kind," he said, bowing to hide the expression of his countenance.

"Then you accept?"

"Yes; with pleasure."

"Then it is settled. Rose Terris comes to us the first week in July. Can you join us then?"

How happy was the girl that day! She was radiant, and won all hearts. For what greater beautifier is there than happiness?

How little did Mrs. Sinclair imagine who it was to whom she introduced the best partners for the dance in the evening, or that this was the lonely little waif to whom she had acted so unwomanly a part. It was almost punishment enough for her unkindness to watch her idolized son's eager attentions; to hate his jealous impatience at the homage she received.

She saw—for nothing was lost upon her that touched that beloved son's happiness—that this charming girl listened with shy sweetness to his voice, and was listless and indifferent to any other.

She marked that she waltzed with him alone, and knew by a thousand signs that he could win her, and that life could hold no greater happiness for him. She knew that this barrier that nothing could throw down must be forever between them, and she would have given all her state and wealth if she could have removed it, and made him happy who had sacrificed so much for them.

"Miss Harcourt, this is my sister Helen, Mrs. Meredith. I have not introduced her, I think."

Constance bowed coldly to the lady who had voted her an "uncivilized creature," but Mrs. Meredith would not be repressed.

"This *fete* of mamma's seems a decided success; do you not think so, Miss Harcourt? The weather is glorious! Do you like garden parties?"

"Far better than balls so late in the season," says Constance, with easy indifference, fanning herself softly.

"And yet you have been to a great many balls."

"Yes," Constance says, turning her head to see with whom Ernest is dancing.

"Are you not going to waltz?" persists Mrs. Meredith. "I have plenty of partners so anxious!"

"No, thanks," says Constance; "I do not waltz."

"Not waltz! I thought I saw you waltzing with my brother?"

The blood rushed to her fair face; she had answered at random, for she was looking with jealous eyes as Ernest carefully folded her opera-cloak round his late partner.

"Captain Sinclair was good enough to put up with my awkward steps, but I would not venture with any one else," she says, resolutely turning to Mrs. Meredith, and preparing for the society talk that was proper in a fashionable ball-room.

With sweetest visions of coming happiness, Constance prepared for her visit to Holmdene. There she should have him on whom her hopes were centered to herself. Here he was sometimes absent-minded, would remain away for days, and when he came would be cold and quite distant, till she had exerted herself to chase away his gloom, and then he would be himself again. When she was always with him, she thought, she would be so kind and loving, that by the very force of her great affection she should win him.

One secret mission she went on before she left town. She took a goodly sum of money, concealed it about her, dressed herself in a plain black dress and ample waterproof, tied over her black hat a thick veil and went out.

She had thought often of this expedition. Perhaps in some wretched den some kin of hers were sheltered: while she was reveling in luxury, they might be wanting bread; and she determined to ascertain all she could of her unknown parentage.

A cab put her down at the spot where her infant years had been passed, and with a quick, unfaltering step, she went on. She knew the kind of neighborhood it was very well, and went up to a policeman standing at the end of the court.

"I am going down here," she said. "Keep near me; do not interfere unless I am molested, then use your authority."

She slipped a dollar into his hand, and the man, with a very pleased smile, followed her.

Yes; this was the place, but how stifling it seemed! It was summer; in the parks the trees were green, the flowers were blooming, the birds were singing, and above all the sun was shining; but here, in this close, narrow alley, his rays could not penetrate; he was shut out by the tall houses, with their patched windows, open, rickety doors, and dirty steps.

Ah! how wretched it all was; how she pitied the groups of pale, thin, dirty little children that were everywhere. She felt again hungry and shivering with very sympathy with their wretchedness.

It was the midsummer holidays, or so many

would not have been idling there. They would at least have been in well ventilated, clean rooms, instead of playing in the gutter.

"Oh, gemini!" said one precocious, old-looking little girl; "if there ain't a lady a-standing looking at us!"

"Oh, it's only one of them with them tracks. Go on with w'ot you was a-doing. Where's them bits of platter we was playing with?"

"Do you know where Bill Spriggins lives now?" asked the musical voice of the lady.

The children stopped playing, and stood up. The voice was gentle and refined, and they unconsciously did homage to it.

"Him as keeps the 'tater store?" asked one.

"Has he a store? He used only to have a stall."

"Yes, I remember when he only had a stall; but he's got a store now, and that's it," pointing to one on the other side of the street.

It had no glass in the window; but potatoes, stale cabbages, strings of onions and decaying fruit were displayed for sale.

"He lives there? Thank you."

Then Constance stooped down, and left in each dirty hand a silver coin. Never, perhaps, had those lean fingers grasped such a sum. A quarter! And they looked at each other with wondering gaze.

Constance crossed the court, and entered the store of Mr. William Spriggins.

He was a sottish, brutal fellow, and looked at Constance with no pleasant eye.

"You are Mr. Spriggins?" she asked.

"Yes. W'ot's your business? I don't want no tracks—haven't got time to read 'em, and shouldn't if I had."

"I have no tracts," said Constance, quietly. "I only want a little information, which I am willing to pay for."

At the word "pay," Mr. Spriggins looked up.

"Well, fire away."

"Do you remember a little girl who lived in this court with an old woman they called Granny Grant?"

"I should think so, seeing as it was in my old father's rooms her mother died. What do you want with her?"

"I want to know anything of her parents that you can tell me."

"I don't know nothing about them. When the mother died she left nothing but a squalling baby, that my mother took care of."

"Is your mother dead?"

"No," returned the dutiful son. "Worse than that—she's bed-ridden."

"Can I see her?" asked Constance.

"You can if—" And Mr. Spriggins drew a black pipe out of his pocket, and proceeded to fill it as he looked significantly in Con's face,

"Sal!" he called, as a half dollar passed from Con's hand to his; "here's a young woman wants to see mother."

A pale, dirty woman came from the back of the shop.

"Come this way, please," and Constance threaded her way among heaps of coke, sacks of potatoes, and stale refuse.

"What is it, Sal?" said a fretful voice from a miserable bed in one corner of the room, to which the woman conducted Constance.

"I've brought a lady to see you."

"I don't want no readin'," said the old quavering voice. "I'm shaking with the cold, though they say the sun is shining. A drop o' gin would warm my old bones, and do me more good than all the readin'."

"You shall have gin, dame, and something warm to wrap you in, and something good to eat, if you will answer me a few questions."

"Sal, the lady here says you are to fetch a drop o' gin; don't water it, or drink it half."

"Bring a bottle *full*, with the cork undrawn, and a glass and a corkscrew, and some meat; you can keep the change."

The woman looked from the money to Con's vailed face; then with a sort of gasp, disappeared.

"A whole bottle-full!" murmured the old woman. "Why, it'll last ever so long. You needn't tell Bill. I'll hide it, and have a drop when I feels cold and faint. And now the questions, miss."

"You were with a young woman who died nineteen years ago and left a baby—do you follow me?"

"Yes, yes," said the old woman, dreamily. "I remember the gal; nineteen year—is it nineteen year?"

"I think so. Tell me, dame, all you know. You shall never want anything to keep you warm again, if you will. Here is money, and you shall have more when that is gone!"

"You're good, whoever you are," said the old woman, tying up the money in the corner of the yellow sheet. "Well, miss, Bill and me used to rent the top of a house, and let it out in rooms. They was middlingish comfortable, though small, and one day a young woman came and took one; she was to pay fifty cents a week. She wore a widow's cap, and had a very young baby with her. She was very quiet and used to work all day, and I could see she had known better days; and I could see, too, she was dying by inches, she coughed so, and could hardly get up the stairs. It was very cold, and she had not been out for a week, when one day she sent for me. She was lying on the bed, and the baby was a-crawling on the floor. I could see in a minit she was bad, but I spoke up cheerful, and said, 'You wanted me, my dear?'"

"Mrs. Spriggins," she says, 'I'm dying. What will become of my baby?'

"Oh, no, you ain't," I said. 'You're young, and it takes a lot to kill.'

"I am quite sure," she said, in a faint, low tone.

"Where are your friends?" I says; 'for I can see you've been brought up well.'

"I haven't one," she says. 'My mother was a doctor's widow, and when she died I went out as a companion, and the young master married me.'

"Well," I says, 'you did very well, then.'

"No," she says; 'for we came up to New York. He had very little money, and it was soon gone. He had no trade or profession, and he listed and went to the war.'

"Yes," said Constance, breathlessly; "he—he went to the war!"

"Yes, and the gal she tried to support herself part by teaching and sewing; but he was not away long—he came back wounded. He went to his father's house. The old people were dead, the furniture sold, and the house re-let. So he came to his young wife, and they tried to live; but he got worse—decline, she said it was—and at last died. And the poor mother, for she had her baby then, tried to live for its sake; but it was of no use. She had caught the disease nursing her husband, and was dying of it."

"Poor mother, she died!" sobbed Constance.

"Yes, before morning, begging me, with her last breath, not to send the baby to the poor-house, and we didn't. Old Bill, he got fond of her, and we kept her. She was that kind, though she was but a slip of a gal, to my old man while he lay ill, that I never forgot her, and when he died would have been glad to keep her, but young Bill he wasn't willing, so old granny took her. She fared but poorly then; but she was a real comfort to old gran, for the child had a grateful heart."

"I hope she had," said Constance, in a trembling tone, "and for that good deed will do all she can for you."

"She can't," said the old woman; "for she disappeared suddenly the day old gran was taken to the poor-house, and has never been heard of since, unless—" She hesitated.

"Unless I am she. Yes; your suspicions are right. I am that destitute baby. Tell me, what can I do for you? Will you leave this dreadful place?" she continued, looking around with a shudder.

"No; I couldn't be comfortable out of the alley, miss. I was born in it, married from it, and should like to die in it."

"Then you shall be made comfortable in it. Money for food and fire, warm coverings for your bed, and a bottle of spirits every week, dame. Can I do anything else?"

"No, miss—Heaven bless your grateful heart!—except let me see your face once."

Constance threw back her veil with a gentle smile.

"Yes," said the old woman, raising herself on her elbow; "the same look as stood by Bill to the last; the same eyes that looked so coaxing when she was a baby. You are a grand lady, I know, but you are a good one, too; and I hope you may be a happy one as well!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### FIGHTING AGAINST FATE.

SECRETLY to the general's amusement, Constance found so many pressing invitations, that it was not till the second week in July that she was ready to leave town, and then Captain Sinclair and Rose accompanied them.

How beautiful Holmdene looked in the summer gloaming, as they drove through the lovely avenue to the mansion.

A long line of well-trained servants received them, the silver tea-service glittered in the drawing-room, everywhere was beauty and taste. John Foster's wealth had been judiciously expended, and the result was perfection.

Constance would have been supremely happy if she could have convinced herself that Ernest really loved her. Sometimes the conviction would raise her to the greatest delight, and at others she was in the depths of despair. For Captain Sinclair was as uncertain at Holmdene as in New York. One day he would ride with Constance, and seem, by every gentle attention, to prove that he loved her, but the next he would ride with Rose, and try manfully to speak and act with the same expression. He would walk with Rose, listen with bent head to her childish prattle, as if he did not see the wistful expression of the lovely eyes, or the sorrowful curve of the pretty mouth, until he could not bear it any longer, and would bring back her smiles by words and looks too true to his heart's feelings to be mistaken.

He knew she was learning to love him, and he felt a traitor to her at every blush or smile. He loved her as he had never deemed it possible he could love; but for her sake kept an iron hand on its expression. And she, absorbed in the dream of winning his heart, never thought how entirely it was already given, and waited day after day in trembling hope of some assurance of it, but no assurance came to her.

If Ernest gathered their bouquets, they were equally pretty; if he read to them, it was as often Rose's favorite author as Con's. But he said to himself that this could not go on; a month of this would kill him.

"I am going to ride," said Constance, standing in her habit on the terrace. "Will you come, Captain Sinclair?"

"I believe I have promised Miss Terris to

do something for her, if you will excuse me. The general is going, is he not?"

"Yes; but I thought you would like to come."

"If you will pardon my seeming rudeness, I—"

"Pray say no more," said Constance, refusing his proffered assistance as she mounted her horse. "Good-by, Captain Sinclair."

Ernest bit his lip at the cold, formal tone, and, raising his hat, turned away.

"I could not trust myself with her this morning," he murmured, "she looks so lovely, so sweet and gentle. What a weak, pitiful traitor I am to her! Why for my own gratification should I cloud her bright life? I must get away for both our sakes—I *must* go! I should go mad if I saw her wretched. She will forget me and be happy now; and I—what shall I do?—forget, too? Nay, that at least is beyond me. I can *never* forget!"

He did not order his horse, but, pulling his hat moodily over his brow, walked on through the grounds.

Nor were Con's meditations more pleasing.

"I must have deceived myself," she thought.

"I have not—I never shall win his love, and must live without it; but, at least, he shall never know how weak I am."

"I will walk to the house through the lawn, dear," she said to the general, on their return. "I am tired of riding; and you wish to speak to the gardeners."

"Very well, my love," said the general; and Constance, gathering up her habit, sprung to the ground.

But scarcely had the general ridden off, and the groom disappeared with her horse, when she saw Captain Sinclair striding along, with his arms folded, and his looks on the ground.

She stopped, uncertain whether to fly or to remain, when Ernest, looking up, saw her.

He was by her side directly.

"Where is Rose?" she asked.

"Rose? Oh, Rose is busy!" he said, confusedly; for in truth he had forgotten Rose.

Then an awkward silence fell between them.

Ernest was nerving himself to tell her of a resolution just arrived at, and Constance was a little resentful.

"Did I tell you, Miss Harcourt, that my pleasant holiday was drawing to a close?—that, in fact, I—well, that I must leave Holmdene to-morrow?"

He turned his head away and stooped to gather a lily of the valley. He dared not look at her.

"To-morrow?"

What hopeless sorrow was in the voice!

"Yes," he said, smiling sadly; "I must not trifle any longer!"

"Trifle!" How the word cut her to the heart!

"Why should you?" said Constance, turning pale, and with quivering lips toward him.

"Why should you ever trifle?"

"It is my normal condition," said Ernest.

"I have been a trifler all my life."

"Surely life should hold something nobler than your own amusement?"

"It should, Miss Harcourt. Sometimes I feel it might, even for me; but the fit passes. I am naturally fickle, I suppose. When I was out West I wanted to come home. Now I am home I want to go back."

"Are you going back?"

"If I can. It is that which takes me to New York."

"And you will not regret leaving?"

"Why should I? I like change."

His voice he controlled well, though every pulse was throbbing with passionate emotion.

"Miss Harcourt," he continued, "if you think of me at all, will you think kindly of me?"

"Why should I not?" she murmured.

"Because I do not deserve it. Yet, if you knew all, you would at least be sorry for me."

"Why?" she asked, thinking how sad he seemed.

"Because I shall never be happy again."

Constance shuddered. His tone was hopeless and almost desperate. The tie that bound him to her, then, precluded his ever being happy.

"Oh, if he could have loved me!" she thought. "But our hearts are not at our own disposal. Alas! for both."

It was a relief when Rose's white dress gleamed through the trees.

"I have found you," she said, merrily, "after searching everywhere for my promised escort."

"I was returning for you," said Ernest. "See! I have found one of your favorite flowers."

"How kind of you!" said Rose, taking the lily from his hand.

"So, my dear, you preferred a walk with a young cavalier to a ride with an old one."

The rich blood crimsoned the fair face.

"You are wrong for once. I should have preferred a stroll by myself, and had intended to have one, but I met Captain Sinclair. I don't know if he thought he was making my walk an agreeable one."

"It will, at any rate, be the last one I shall have an opportunity of spoiling," he said, "as I leave by the early train to-morrow."

He read the pathetic despair in the lovely eyes, the almost uncontrollable agitation of her heart, and determined to shorten as much as possible the inevitable parting.

"I am sorry those military affairs could not wait to the end of the month," said the general, as he stood with his young guest in the break-

fast-room the next morning. "We have enjoyed the last few weeks so much. I have never seen my darling so happy."

"I shall never forget your kindness, general," said Ernest, a look of pain contracting his straight brows. "You must always believe me grateful."

"Grateful! Nonsense! The benefit has been mutual; but, my dear lad, if you wish to catch this train, you have not a minute to spare. Where are the girls? Ah! there they are, on the lawn."

Ernest stepped through the French window. There was no softness in his look; he had nerved himself to say farewell to his heart's dearest hope with seeming indifference.

"It is better so," he thought; "she can think of me then but with contempt, and will soon learn to forget."

"Good-by, Miss Terris!" he said, extending his hand. "The general says I have but fifteen minutes to catch my train."

"Good-by, Captain Sinclair!" she said, coldly. How she resented the part he had played to the dear friend she loved so well. "A pleasant journey to you."

"Will you wish me a pleasant journey, Miss Harcourt?"

As she turned to him she could not control the agony of her heart's defeat.

Ernest lifted his hat with an air of bewildered pain, turned without one word of farewell, and the next instant the great gate clanged behind him.

"Oh, my dearest!" exclaimed Rose, in accents of terror, as Constance sunk on her knees and hid her face in the folds of Rose's dress; "he has broken your heart!"

"Hush!" she said. "It—it was my own fault; he saw my heart, and pitied me. Ah, Rose, he will never love me!"

"He is not worthy, dear; forget him."

A smile so mournfully sad crossed the tender lips, that Rose vowed to herself that she hated Captain Sinclair as she could never hate anyone else.

Rose returned home, and Constance devoted herself to the general, to whom she was the greatest and tenderest of daughters, but her step lost its lightness, and her voice its tuneful cadence. She was thoughtful of all, but in her heart was despair.

## CHAPTER X.

### ON THE DOWNWARD PATH.

It is spring again, and Holmdene is putting on her brightest garments. Robes of green, wreaths of violets, garlands of snowdrops, anemones and hyacinths render it one of the most beautiful spots in the world. New life is springing up, new beauties are developing; but in the heart of its mistress it is sweeter still.

Most beautiful, yet how changed she is, as she sits in her own favorite sitting-room. Hopeless sorrow and withering disappointment have struck out the charm of youth's first freshness; but in its place has come a refining influence more seductive.

The oval face is thinner; the clear features more sharply defined.

In the deep, splendid eyes is a mournful light inexpressibly touching; but they brighten with wistful eagerness as she looks at the letter she holds.

It is a large, thick, square envelope, with a pretty monogram on the seal—"R. T.," so skillfully entwined, that no one would find out the letters without the key. Constance knows it instantly, for she very often has such mis-sives.

The letters are like Rose herself, bright and sparkling, and contain everything she thinks will interest her beloved friend, whose life is clouded by what she calls the perfidy of Captain Sinclair.

"My dear Constance, this letter will be a dull one. I tell you so at the beginning, that you may not be disappointed. I have no news, either good or bad. Stay! Yes, I have, dear, and you shall have it.

"My darling, you are avenged, for Captain Sinclair is no longer one of us. He is ruined, and by his own folly. Papa tells me he has lost a fortune within these last months at the gaming-table. Think of it, Conny, dear. He, last summer so kind and courteous, so manly and handsome, a gambler! I cried myself quite ill when mamma denied herself to him, and when we met him in the park she told me to turn my head, that I might not bow; but I did peep, and saw that he looked wretchedly ill, reckless and *desperate*—that is the word—and my heart ached for him in spite of his misdeeds, for I declare he looks handsomer than ever, and is quite as much a favorite with the young ladies.

"His father will not speak to him, and his proud sisters do not notice him. You hate him, of course, and from you he deserves nothing else; but oh, the pity of it! You two seemed suited to each other—yet both so unhappy. Why should things be so crooked, I wonder?"

The letter fell from her hand.

"Oh, my darling," she sobbed, laying her head on her arms, "if you could have loved me, I might have saved you!"

She was restless and excited all day. The face of Ernest Sinclair, pale and reckless, was before her, and at night she wept bitter tears over his fall.

She thought of him so constantly that there arose a wild wish to help him—to stay his downward course—and with Constance to resolve was to act.

The good general was startled and surprised at the sudden desire of his daughter to go to New York, for she had decided to remain the whole summer at Holmdene; but he had no wish but hers, and within three days they were there.

A perfect fever of excitement seemed then to possess the girl, who for months had only

existed. She gave the most brilliant entertainments, accepted every invitation, and was at the Opera continually.

But she soon found the hope of meeting Captain Sinclair was a vain one. The doors that had been so freely opened to the rich and handsome captain were closed against the ruined gamester.

In vain her thoroughbred bore her round the park. No upright, soldier-like form rewarded her eager search.

At last, one morning in June, she saw him. It was an unfashionable hour; but Constance Harcourt's horse or carriage was continually there now at unfashionable hours.

He was leaning with listless grace against a noble tree, watching with a passing interest some little ones at play. He did not look up or see Constance as she passed, but she quickly descended and retraced her steps, her heart throbbing wildly, but resolute to speak to him now that she had found him.

As she stood for a second opposite to him, one of the little ones fell almost at his feet.

Ernest sprung forward, raised it, gently soothed its cries, and gave it to the nurse, who had hurried to receive it. As he resumed his old attitude and raised his head, the kind smile died away, his brow contracted, and his pale lips quivered, for Constance, in her girlish beauty and sweet purity, was close beside him. He shrunk back, but her ungloved hand was extended, her glorious eyes were gazing on him with gentle pleading. He raised his hat, and the white band fell to her side.

"Constance," he said, hoarsely—"Miss Harcourt, why are you here?"

"Why are you here?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"Where is your carriage?" he continued, without heeding her question. "You should not be here alone. If you are not ashamed to walk by my side, I will take you to it."

"I do not wish to go yet," she said, gently. "And why should I be ashamed to walk by your side?"

"The general would tell you why; but if he is too generous, ask Rose Terris."

"I shall not ask Rose; I do not wish to know. I see you are impatient with me, but I shall not go yet. Have you been ill?"

"I have been mad, and am so still, I think. Pray do not look at me so; I do not want your pity, Constance Harcourt. Will you go?"

"Yes, I will go," said Constance, frightened at his vehemence; "but can I be of no comfort to you if I stay?"

"You can deprive me of the little self-control I have left."

"Why are you so unkind?" she pleaded, wringing her delicate hands in an agony of distress.

"Have I ever been kind?"

"Perhaps not; then begin now. You are ill—unhappy. Come with me to Fifth avenue. Will you?"

"Do you know what the world calls me?"

"What does it call you?"

"A ruined gamester."

"Then you have greater need of kindness. Come; it can all be set right. You are not ruined."

Ernest looked with such quivering lips, such anguish in his eyes, that Constance involuntarily drew nearer to him, and laid her trembling hand upon his arm.

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured; "my love—my gem beyond price!"

A sudden radiance suffused the girl's countenance as she caught the low words "darling," "love." Had she heard aright?

"Ernest," she whispered, "speak to me again!"

But Captain Sinclair did not—could not speak; he pressed the little hand to his lips, and then turning abruptly, without one glance at her, strode rapidly away.

"She did not despise me," he thought, as he reached his room. "But she has suffered—oh, I could see that—and in my fall, she will suffer again! If I were dead she would be happier."

And he brooded all day on that thought. Grief for the dead she might conquer, and be happy again, but the sorrow of his degradation she would feel always.

He had been the spoiled and petted child of fortune; every desire had been forestalled, he had never learned self-government, and this hopeless love was more than he could bear.

## CHAPTER XI.

### REDEEMED BY LOVE.

CONSTANCE returned to her home with a lightened heart. Those words seemed the key to all.

Yes; he loved her; nothing but love could have given such an accent to his words, or such a light to his eyes.

And she would find him, tell him all; and then—Visions of happiness floated around her all day.

It was already past midnight when she returned from a dinner-party, whither the general had not accompanied her. And as she waited his coming from his club, her dreams were of the sweetest.

Rather later than usual the general came in.

"What is it, dear?" asked Constance, perceiving instantly that he looked distressed. "You are not well!"

"I am well, my love; but I am thoroughly upset."

"How?"

"Of course, Constance, you remember Captain Sinclair?"

"Yes, dear. What of him?"

"Since he was with us last summer, I am told he has been going downhill. I was sorry, for I liked him very much; and fancied some one else did. I am happy it was not so."

The general paused, and looked across to the graceful figure of Constance; but her looks were downcast, and he went on, "I saw Mr. Sinclair at the club to-night, and he said Ernest had lost within the last few months the whole of his fortune! in fact, little remained but his pay."

"I had heard this before he left," said Constance, quietly. "Is that all?"

"All!" The general was slightly surprised, and showed it. "Is it not enough? And, as if to confirm his father's words, I have just seen him enter one of the worst gambling houses in New York."

"You are sure you were not mistaken, dear? Where is this place?"

"In — street. No wonder he is ruined if he visits there. It is a perfect nest of sharpers!"

After the general had left her, Constance rose, enveloped herself in a large black silk mantle, tied on a short fall of black gauze, and, drawing the hood forward, softly descended the wide stair-case.

The general's latch-key hung in the hall, and of this she possessed herself, and opening the hall door, gently drew it close, and stepped on to the pavement.

A cab deposited her in — street; but here she was at a loss. The houses were large, spacious mansions, and looked all alike; she could not single one out by any peculiarity. As she slowly went on scrutinizing them, a gentleman passed her. He was in evening dress, and ascended the steps of one of the houses, tapping with his knuckles.

The door was opened by invisible means, and this struck the quick-witted street Arab. She felt no longer the daughter of a courtly old gentleman, to whom her every wish was law. No longer the mistress of Holmdene, with a crowd of well-trained servants to defend her, but "Con," the self-reliant, undaunted waif, carrying out a purpose she had set herself, and from which she did not mean to turn back. Alone at midnight, on the steps of a noted gaming-house, she was as fearless to fulfill that purpose as if she had been in her own drawing-room.

She ascended the steps, and tapped, as her predecessor had done. The door swung open, and she entered, peeped up a wide staircase with gilded banisters and beautiful statues holding shaded lamps; flowers in full bloom in every niche, and a wide velvet carpet was under her feet.

She quietly ascended the first flight of stairs, and here her passage was barred by an attendant; but she was not dismayed. She drew a crisp note from the pocket of her mantle, and silently handed it to him.

The man crumpled up the note and stood aside without speaking, and Con passed up another flight of stairs similarly appointed. Then a door in front of her was sharply opened, and Con entered a magnificent saloon.

At first the light blinded her, but presently she saw more clearly, and heard the rattle of dice and a kind of hiss made by the shuffle of the cards.

In the old days of Con's childhood she had seen the gamblers in the alley, with a rickety table between them, a wretched tallow candle to give them light, gamble away their children's food.

Sometimes old Bill Spriggins would have her behind his chair to see fair play, when his sight was getting dim. And it came back to her how she had detected a cheat with a loaded dice, and how she had been knocked down, trampled on, and nearly killed in the awful fight that had ensued. This was a different scene indeed; but the same expression contracted the gamblers' visages.

There were two rows of tables, covered with green baize, and they were all occupied by groups of different ages and sexes.

At last she saw Captain Sinclair seated at a small table quite at the end of the room. Opposite to him sat a gentleman not young, with keen restless looks, long, drooping mustache, and iron-gray hair.

He played, and laughed, and jested as Ernest lost, for the latter played restlessly and lost continually, and in his look was a desperate defiance.

Constance glided behind him. She had found him; she would never let him leave her again till he knew she was his wife. Then he might go if he chose. And so she was waiting and watching there.

Neither men looked up, and Ernest again lost. He leaned back in his chair, touching, without knowing it, the girl he loved, and drew out his watch.

"It is scarcely morning yet," he said, wearily, "but my banker told me to-day that my last check overdraws my account. I have my watch—come, I will stake that for one hour's more forgetfulness, and then—"

The silent figure behind his chair leans forward, and as she does so, sees the gleam of a pistol in his breast-pocket. She does not speak. The play begins, and she stands like a statue—watching.

At the first throw, Captain Sinclair lost, and his opponent's hand instantly closed on the dice he had thrown.

Then, quick as thought, Con glided from be-

hind Ernest, and gripped with her long nervous fingers the hand that held the dice.

"They are loaded!" she said, in a hoarse whisper, utterly unlike her own voice.

Ernest sprung up, and, with his own strong fingers, forced open the man's hand.

The dice fell on the table, and Ernest instantly took them up.

"It is true," he said.

In a moment all was confusion, the tables were deserted, and an excited crowd gathered round Captain Sinclair.

In vain Constance strove to keep near him; the crowd seemed to jostle her further from him at every step. From the sides and in front the men nearest were closing round, and forcing her backward. She felt quite powerless in their hands, and her courage began to desert her; a fear of she knew not what possessed her, and a piercing cry, "Ernest, save me!" sounded above the din.

The shock was electric. He had been perfectly unconscious whose hand had seized the sharper's; but that anguished voice was Constance Harcourt's.

With a bound he was among the paid attendants who were so successfully baffling her efforts to get to his side.

It would have taken a dozen good men to have restrained the athletic young soldier.

"Constance," he gasped, holding her wrist in a convulsive grasp, "what does this mean? How did you come here?"

Her hood had fallen back; her magnificent hair fell on her shoulders, but the concealing gauze still hid the upper part of her face.

"Pray tell us," said a tall, dissipated-looking man, coming close to the panting girl. "It is rather a novel situation for a young lady in your position, for I believe it is Miss Harcourt,"—and he attempted to look beneath her veil.

"How dare you?" said Ernest, haughtily. "Mr. Goring, if you are a gentleman, allow the lady to pass. You—you are mistaken."

"I believe not," he said, with an insulting smile.

He had no intention of allowing the girl who had received his intrusive attentions with contemptuous indifference to escape so easily.

"It would be too bad to allow the fair *incognito* to be borne off so unceremoniously," drawled a young aristocrat close by Ernest's side; "at least she should be made to unmask and tell us why she is here, as a penalty for coming."

"The first who bars our passage," said Ernest, drawing the pistol from his breast, "receives the contents of this!"

His white lips would scarcely form his words, so deadly was his fear of her identity being confirmed.

But James Goring was not defeated. He was

close to Constance, and raising his hand, he drew out the fastening. The gauze fell from her brow, revealing her pale, lovely countenance and flashing eyes, as she stood among that lawless crew.

A murmur of surprise and admiration followed the revelation.

"Miss Harcourt!" they exclaimed.

But who shall describe the feelings of Ernest Sinclair as the piece of gauze fluttered to the ground? If a withering, fierce glance of scorn and fury could have killed, James Goring would have fallen dead!

In his bewildered agony he drew her to him, and passed his arm with protecting tenderness around her. How his very soul was moved!

For him she had risked—ay, and lost her fair fame. Those fatal words had revealed his love, and she had imperiled her own spotless name to win him from perdition. And he was powerless to shield her!

But Con's courage had returned. She was safe for his arm was round her. Her moral superiority gave a ring to her always musical accents, as she turned her pure, fearless glance from one to another.

"Gentlemen," she said, and her voice thrilled even their lawless hearts, "you are mistaken. I am indeed the daughter of General Harcourt; but I am also Captain Sinclair's wife!"

What better apology could she frame for her presence there?

The men respectfully drew on one side, and the next minute the husband and wife were on the pavement outside, with the morning twilight breaking up the gloomy night.

Captain Sinclair beckoned to the driver of his waiting cab, lifted her into it, and drew back.

Constance sprung forward.

"I want you! I have so much to say!"

"Do not tempt me! Good by!—good-by, my love, forever!"

A deadly fear was in her heart. She instinctively understood him, and grasped his arm convulsively. That awful pistol was still in his possession.

"You shall not go!" she said. "You are mad to-night! Come with me! You shall not refuse me! Oh, if you love me, come!"

If he loved her! He had suffered so much, he was exhausted; he could contend no longer. With a despairing sigh, he sprung in.

The carriage drove off, and he turned and drew her to him.

"You have declared yourself my wife," he said, with a sad, weary smile; "so you may listen this once while I tell you that I love you with all the strength of my manhood. But, oh, my darling, how shall I tell you that your generous love has ruined your fair fame; that to-morrow this tale will be everywhere—Miss

Harcourt's name on lips not worthy to speak it?"

"Then, dear, I will never use it again. I will take the one I love better—the one I have a better right to."

"What is that name?"

"Sinclair."

"Constance?—and Sinclair? In mercy do not so bewilder me! How can you be Constance Sinclair?"

"Because, Ernest, I am your forsaken wife!"

He gazed at her with speechless thankfulness. What undreamed of and almost unsupportable happiness!

"Are you glad?" she whispered.

He had no words to express his gladness. He bowed his head on her shoulder, and the light was dim, and the carriage at this moment drew up with a jerk, so perhaps Con was mistaken when she thought there were tears in the softened blue eyes.

He did not hesitate now to follow Constance into the drawing-room, and here, as daylight deepened, with his arm around her, he listened to the story of her adoption by the general, her hopes and fears, her love and despair.

"If you could have seen into my heart, my darling, you would have known how true it always has been to you. You are the only woman I have ever loved. You believe me?"

"As I believe that you alone have ever gained one thought or feeling of mine. But my love dates further back than yours, dear. I remember my love as he was years ago, when I thought him all I know he will become, for the sake of the girl his goodness saved from death."

"Heaven helping me," he said, "I will; for you, my own true, spotless little wife, have saved me from worse than death. You do not need my promise never to touch a card again. You know I will not. I have played from reckless desperation, not from love of it."

The servants were beginning to descend to their respective duties before Ernest left his new-found wife, and then only for a bath and change of dress, for he was in the morning-room when Constance descended.

How lovely she looked!—pale and rather tired, with soft, drooping lids, but with the shyest, most tender grace in her fond greeting.

And Ernest, in his deep happiness, looked almost himself again, and worthy to be the husband of so peerless a woman.

They told their story to the good old general, each holding a hand, and assured him, with warmest affection, that he had gained a son, not lost a daughter; and he, with a fond smile, forgave them, and prayed for a blessing on their future lives.

Mrs. Sinclair's surprise, and we must say thankfulness, was unbounded, but she entered the drawing-room in Fifth avenue with very

uncertain feelings as to the reception by her son's wife.

But there was not an ungenerous spark in Con's noble nature, and she received her with as timid and appealing a look as if she were still the despised waif of the lady's recollection.

She loved her son, and it was a passport to his wife's gentle deference, and Mrs. Sinclair herself felt positive gratitude to the lovely girl who had twice saved him, and willingly responded to the appeal.

And that son for whose future she had shed such bitter tears, was the proudest and happiest of husbands, as, after one week at Holmdene, they returned to the general, who had consoled himself with the society of Rose Terris—the sauciest and happiest of friends in their reunion.

Of course the world wondered (when will it cease to wonder at something?) what had kept Captain and Mrs. Sinclair apart, but the lady's entertainments were very brilliant, the gentleman very handsome and gallant, and society forgave them the mystification. But after that one season society claimed very little of their time, for they pass most of their lives at Holmdene, which has become one of the most popular of country homes.

John Foster is not forgotten, nor his wealth misapplied, for no one could have sympathized with the friendless and the wretched so well as she who had become his heiress.

THE END.

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